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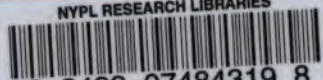
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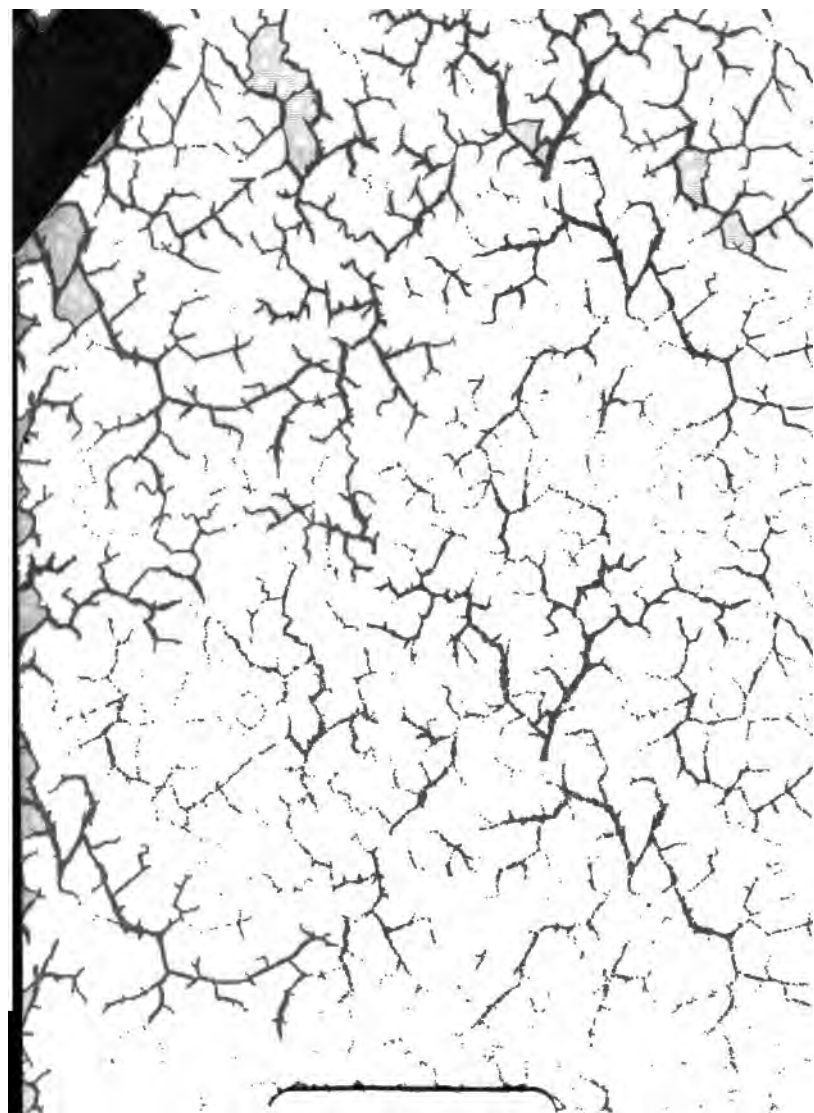
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PLEASANT WATERS

GRAHAM CLAYTOR



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PLEASANT WATERS:

A

STORY OF SOUTHERN LIFE AND CHARACTER.

BY

GRAHAM CLAYTOR.

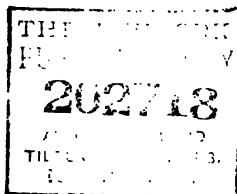
"Still o'er these scenes my mem'ry wakes,
And fondly broods with miser care;
Time but the impression deeper makes,
As streams their channels deeper wear."

PHILADELPHIA:

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY.

1888.

J. N. E.



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PLEASANT WATERS:

A STORY OF SOUTHERN LIFE AND CHARACTER.

CHAPTER I.

MORE than a month after the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia upon the plains of Appomattox, General Joseph E. Johnston issued his final order to the little band of troops under his command in the Carolinas. Already the melancholy march of many a battle-scarred warrior had ended upon the threshold of a ruined and desolate home. And now the final order of this faithful general to his few faithful followers, terminating their official relations, was issued. All was over. Nothing remained to the disbanded troops but to obtain honorable discharges and to return to peaceful pursuits among their families and kindred.

It was with the weary weight of years of trial, and fatigue, and disappointment that the little army,

shattered, beaten, and beggared, made ready to return to ruined and beggarly homes.

It was near the middle of May. The foliage was already thick and green in Southern field and forest. The booming of cannon and the peal of musketry had ceased forever (let it be hoped) along Southern hill and valley. Brightly the sun shone that day, but it shone upon a land filled with a deep and solemn pathos.

The night following General Johnston's order, a lone soldier sat in his tent. His countenance was gloomy and dejected. And yet the soldier breathed a sigh of relief that the end had come. He had never faltered in his allegiance to the Southern cause. He had never lacked confidence in the great general under whom he so long fought. If need be, he was now ready to lay down his life for his country. But, whatever had been his zeal in time of war, now that the end had come, with promise of speedy restoration of peace, he was heartily glad. He loved his country too well and too wisely to witness with anything but pain the sacrifice of so many noble men and the desolation of so many beautiful homes. He would be as zealous in restoring tranquillity to his country as he had been dauntless in fighting her battles.

While the soldier was absorbed in these reflec-

tions, a man pushed aside the flap which served as a covering for the door of the tent, and quietly entered. For some moments he stood unnoticed.

Presently the soldier turned towards his visitor, and, looking up, recognized an old friend and comrade. He arose to greet him. The two men stood face to face. A blazing pine-knot cast its lurid glare around, plainly revealing the forms and features of the soldiers who stood with clasped hands under the torn and weather-beaten tent.

Pleasant Waters, the occupant of the tent, was tall and rather stout, but not large. By nature he was very erect, but from the fatigues incident to forced marches and field labor he was inclined to stoop. His general appearance, under more favorable circumstances, would impress the stranger as commanding, but to-night he seemed to labor under some great physical debility. His soldier's cap was removed, disclosing a well-shaped head with a suit of light sandy hair, which, contrary to his custom, had been allowed to grow until it almost covered his broad and massive brow. His soft gray eyes, accustomed, under excitement, to sparkle and flash with intelligence, wore a look of calm resignation, and a touch of sadness dwelt in their clear depth. His nose was of comely shape, his mouth rather large, but his lips were smooth and thin, and covered

a set of regular and well-preserved teeth. His complexion was ruddy, and hardened by long exposure.

Richard Bentley, the friend and comrade of Waters, was in many respects his opposite. Much larger in form, in fact almost portly, his was a robust constitution. The fatigues of war had not affected him, in so far, at least, as the rotundity of his figure was concerned. On the contrary, the boys all declared that he fattened on forced marches and guard duty. He was several years the senior of Waters, having already passed his thirtieth year. Light brown hair covered his handsomely-shaped head, and a pair of rich hazel eyes sparkled beneath his broad forehead. His nose and lips were indicative of firmness amounting almost to dogged determination. Physically he was every inch a man, but, in the language of the camp, he was a man "set in his ways." As usual with men of his type, he was strong and constant in his friendships, in his hates bitter and implacable, sometimes even to an unreasonable extent, but, withal, honest and true as steel.

"Well," said Waters, who was first to speak, "I suppose it's all over."

"Yes, yes," quickly responded Bentley. "This is the end of it; it's terrible—terrible! But it cannot be helped. I suppose on to-morrow we take our departure, and 'dream of battle-field no more.'"

"Have you fully determined upon your course?" inquired Waters. "Are you still bent on carrying out that foolish whim of yours?"

"Yes, I am. My mind is fully made up," replied Bentley, "and for that reason I am here to-night to talk with you about some matters of business which I wish to intrust to you. Let us go out in the open air. It's more pleasant than under this tent. Besides, we are not so likely to be disturbed."

Waters assented to his friend's wish. The two men walked together out into the balmy night. They sat down upon a fallen tree not far from the half-open tent. Countless stars pulsated in the unclouded depth of the sky above them. The camp-fires were burning luridly along the hills and in the valleys around them. Somewhere, afar off in the hills, sounded the notes of a bugle.

The warriors engaged in long and earnest conversation.

"And so, Waters," said Bentley,—and he spoke in quiet undertones. It was not his habit, but the hour, the place, the occasion, filled him with a feeling of sadness,—“you have decided to return at once to Virginia.”

"Why should I not?" earnestly responded Waters. "Why should I not? I stood by the old State in her

day of power. I shall not desert her in her time of adversity. I shall most certainly go back to Virginia. Where else, pray, should I go? Duty calls me there. It is calling us both. We must obey the call. Bentley, you *must* return with me."

"Not now," said Bentley, firmly. "Not now. There may be tender ties to draw you back. As for me, my kith and kin are dead, you know,—all dead. Virginia is dead to me. The South itself is prostrate, and without hope. I can't see any future here for her young men. Upon my soul I can't. You may do as you choose, Waters. My determination is fixed. To-morrow I start for California."

Waters looked at the speaker in the glare of the camp-fires. He read in those dimly-lined features nothing but resolute purpose. Yet he must not part from his friend without one last, earnest appeal.

"My dear boy," said he, "you are wrong,—all wrong. I entreat you to reconsider this hasty, ill-advised determination. Reflect a moment. Virginia is our common mother. We are her sons,—none the less in her time of prostration than in her hour of glory. She is one of the great sisterhood of Southern States, bound together in a bond of common sympathy,—bound now by the blood of heroes. Virginia may be prostrate now, but she is not without hope. She needs, and the South needs, more than ever,

the muscles, and sinews, and brains of her young men. It is our solemn duty to return like true patriots to our native State, and by well-directed efforts lift her out of the slough of despair and place her once more upon a sure and firm foundation. We can do it, Bentley. Believe me, we can. There *is* life in the old land yet. The patient toil of her sons in peaceful pursuits will in time—and that at no distant day—repair the ruin and havoc of war. Now, Bentley, hear me. Hear me,—be advised. Go back—go back with me to the old home.”

Waters spoke with all the earnestness of his nature. He paused for a reply. The winds were asleep in the forest. The camp-fires shed a fitful light along the distant hills. Above, in the deep blue vault of heaven, the stars, the patient, peaceful stars, kept silent watch.

Slowly, but firmly, the answer came: “No, Waters, my mind is made up. Nothing you can say can change me. To-morrow I start upon my journey,—you upon yours. Time alone can show which of us has chosen more wisely.

“And now,” continued Bentley, “for the business I came to see you about.” He drew from his pocket an old worn memorandum-book, and took from it a soiled document, which he handed to Waters. “Look at it,” said he.

Waters took the paper and began to examine it. He could with great difficulty ascertain by the dim, uncertain light its contents and purport. When he finished its perusal, he said, "As well as I can make it out, this seems to be a bond, executed to you, in the sum of three thousand dollars, by Josiah Baldwin, of Littleton."

"Exactly so," replied Bentley. "Three thousand dollars, specie payment."

"Well, what about it?" inquired Waters.

"It's just this," replied the other. "You know that at my mother's death I became the fee-simple owner of a small farm near Littleton. The property was of no use to me as a farm. I thought best, therefore, to dispose of it. I placed it in the hands of Mr. Baldwin for sale. The old gentleman was always very fond of me, and, in order to advance my fortunes (as I was considered his prospective son-in-law), he offered me what was then considered a very high price for the farm. I accepted his offer. Having no particular need of the money, I agreed to take Baldwin's obligation for the debt. That is the paper you have. Baldwin is now worth ten times the amount, having somehow managed to grow rich while other people grew poor. That bond I wish to place in your hands."

"Place it in my hands? For what?" asked Waters.

"Wait," said Bentley. "Let me explain further. This money, you understand, is my nest-egg. I don't care to collect it now. I can get along without it for the present. But then, I can't tell what may happen to me in California. I may never return. I now wish to place this bond in your hands, to be collected in case I should at any time need the money. See; I have assigned it to you by endorsement on the back. As the matter now stands, the bond, at its present rate of interest, is a good enough investment. Understand me. I don't wish Mr. Baldwin to be disturbed about it, unless I shall write to you to collect it. But if I die, leaving the bond in your hands, or if you fail to hear from me after a reasonable length of time, consider this your property. I have no kin in Virginia, and you are my best and most trusted friend. Now you understand me, don't you?"

"But, my dear friend," answered Waters, "don't you think the proper course would be to return with me to Virginia, make some more satisfactory arrangement about this matter, and then, if you will, start upon your journey?"

"I tell you, Waters," replied Bentley, "I shall not return. I shall go right on to California. Do as I ask you. Take the bond. Hold it until my return. If I never return, it is yours; but I

shall come back some day. Rest assured of that. One thing more. Keep watch over my little pet,—Helen Baldwin, I mean. She was a mere child when I last saw her. She promised to be a beauty. Tell her that Richard Bentley has gone to make his fortune in the far West. Tell her that before many years he'll be back, and then—well, never mind about that. I shall write sometimes, I suppose."

"If this be your desire," said Waters, "I shall do as you wish; but, Bentley, my good friend——"

Bentley had already arisen from his feet, leaving the paper still in the hands of Waters, who sat meditating in silence upon some plan to prevent his friend from carrying into execution his foolish resolve. Bentley divined his purpose, and before Waters could speak he darted off and disappeared in the darkness.

Waters was alone under the starlight. The camp-fires were burning low in the valleys. The full moon rose like a great ball of fire above the eastern hills. Full of anxious thought for the morrow, Waters arose and slowly entered his tent.

Next morning two men clad in tattered Confederate uniforms, and mounted upon superannuated army steeds, set out on their respective journeys. *One turned his face to the wilds of California.*

The other sought his hearth and home in the village of Littleton, amid the mountains of Virginia, his native State. As the latter slowly rode along over the old gulley-washed, dirt road, where the bones of dead horses lay bleaching in the sun, his thoughts sped before him on "winged steeds" to the old village with its long street, its familiar faces, its ivy-covered church and quiet graves, and to his own beloved and honored homestead.

CHAPTER II.

LITTLETON, as we shall call it for the purposes of this narrative, was, at the beginning of the war between the States, a thriving village of the Old Dominion. From that time to the close of the war its growth was not phenomenal. Its chief boasts were its antiquity and the natural beauty of its surroundings: its little life had its beginning in colonial times, and it was nestled among the green hills of Piedmont, Virginia.

The pike, or great stage-coach line from Bristol, Tennessee, to the city of Richmond, on the James, passed directly through the centre of Littleton, dividing it into two distinct neighborhoods, known as the North- and the South-side respectively. Diverging to the four points of the compass were roads leading out into the surrounding country. The traveller on the road south, on emerging from the village street, proceeded at once up a steep ascent. In a few minutes he was at the summit of a small mountain, the base of which marked the southern limit of the village. From the top of the mountain he looked down into chimneys whence the blue smoke ascended

in spiral columns, marking the position of a hundred or more houses half concealed by the dense foliage of the surrounding trees. To the north were fertile fields, fair meadows, and lovely valleys, with here and there a swiftly-flowing brook to relieve the landscape, refresh the traveller, or turn the busy wheel of industry. To the south and west of the village, within a few minutes' walk, rose high hills that scarcely reached the dignity of mountains, but from whose tops might be seen every point of the surrounding landscape. These hills had long been denuded of their natural growth of trees, and were carpeted with a rich green sod, except that here and there some fertile spot was made to yield to its owner an abundant harvest of wheat, corn, or barley. In such close proximity were they to the village that the pedestrian in the streets looked up and exchanged glances with the harvesters upon the hills, and the ploughman whistling amid the waving corn watched the smoke of his own habitation, or looked down at his own children engaged in innocent sports upon the village green.

That part of the village lying north of the old pike, and sometimes called the "north end," was more usually denominated by the inhabitants of "south end" as "Quality Hill." This was doubtless a sarcastic allusion, because the people of the north end were the happy possessors of a little more of this

world's goods than those of the south end, and were disposed on that account to turn up their noses at their less fortunate brethren.

At the north end lived a very large old banker and a very rich old merchant, a couple of very shrewd old lawyers, and a darling of an Episcopal minister, with very soft hands, very delicate features, and a very downy moustache. Whatever claims the village had to aristocracy were found at the north end. The people were "quality" people, and therefore the neighborhood was Quality Hill. Certain it was that the houses on Quality Hill were more "genteel" than those of the south end. The yards were a little more spacious, and ornamented with more plants and rarer flowers, and a larger supply of shade-trees. But even on Quality Hill a close observer might have discerned shades of difference in the houses and also in the people.

Among the most substantial and most costly of the old-time residences on Quality Hill was the Waters mansion. It was built of brick, and built for comfort rather than for mere worldly show. Nothing was cramped, and there were long porches, wide halls, broad rooms, and around the house a spacious yard with magnificent shade.

Next to this came the many-gabled, two-storied frame buildings, with stuccoed chimneys and dormer-

windows, generally situated a little way back from the street, but so closely hedged in by cedars, magnolias, maples, elms, and tangled shrubbery as to be almost entirely concealed from the view of the passer-by. The dormer-windows and sharp gables stood out conspicuously above the thick foliage, while the great body of the house was hidden beneath the overhanging branches of the trees. Seldom, if ever, did a gleam of sunshine find its way into the little, narrow porch that adorned the front of the house. The Virginia creeper twined and intertwined, and lapped and interlapped, until an almost solid wall of green closed the sides and front of the porch, hardly leaving room for the door. Even in mid-summer the place looked cold and cheerless. The hall floor was always smooth and newly polished with Spanish brown and oil. The parlor, which was usually a small front room, was dark and comfortless. In summer, even, it was cold, damp, and uncomfortable; but in winter, one felt as if encompassed by the walls of an ice-house. It took a whole day for a fire, when kindled on the hearth, to drive out the cold air, and dry the moisture settled on the windows and upon the dark, cold furniture of one of these little front-room parlors. But, cramped and cheerless as was the house with its surroundings, it had claims to antiquity, and was

entitled to more than a passing notice, for genteel people had lived there a great many years.

But there were also houses of very pretentious styles,—houses that boasted of all the modern improvements. They were generally large, frame buildings, situated in most conspicuous places, and painted in most conspicuous colors; houses with innumerable little cramped porches in innumerable little cramped corners; houses with great, wide windows filled with countless little staring lights, that looked one full in the face all the time, for, being supplied with blinds only from within, they were never shut out from gazing into the public streets; houses built for comfort and convenience, perhaps, but first with an eye single to show. They were comfortable and convenient as long as they lasted, but they were not substantial. They reminded one of ready-made clothing: conspicuous with shine and gloss, but cheap and shoddy withal. They disgusted one with their bold, open, come-and-look-at-me airs.

Then Quality Hill had its own little church, with its four tall spires and its bell, its very old, grizzly-bearded, spectacled sexton, and its very young, golden-haired, ruby-lipped rector, who was also spectacled. Every Sabbath morning and evening the aforesaid rector, robed in flowing gown, stepped forth from the *little anteroom* of the church, strode with all the dig-

nity of a stage actor across the chancel, and opened the big Bible that lay on the lecturn. Behind him was the great stained-glass window with the symbolic dove descending in a cloud of glory. Before him sat the congregation of Quality Hill, critically eying the young rector, who returned their gaze with an air of such calm serenity and deep satisfaction as to insure him an attentive hearing.

"The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him." So began the rector in his deepest and most impressive tone, but there was no silence. On the contrary, there was much uprising and down-sitting, much fluttering of fans, and turning of leaves, and clanging of spurs from belated country cousins. But the Rev. Mr. Fairface, nothing daunted, went manfully on. With the aid of his Book of Common Prayer he arrived safely at the point where the sermon began. His hearers were respectful enough in their attention to his discourse, but they listened to the young man with a kind of half-credulous smile, as if wondering whether he really believed, after all, the half he so earnestly endeavored to impress upon them.

There were other churches, though not on Quality Hill. There was the Presbyterian church, with its dark brown walls and long narrow windows, and its single *sharp-pointed* spire. It was a gloomy edifice,

surrounded by a spacious yard of smooth green sod and mulberry-trees shrivelled and bent with age. The membership of this church was very small. Few were called, fewer chosen. The church was too gloomy, the pastor too cold and serious, and the doctrines too severe for the wild free spirits of the mountain town.

Then there was the Methodist church. No yard intervened, but a broad brick pavement led up to the door. It was a very small church, but a very busy little church, with a very loud little pastor and a very happy little congregation.

At the extreme east end of the village stood the Baptist church. It boasted a yard, a fence, a broad entrance, a very large membership, and a pastor who talked through his nose. All the pastors for generations back had talked through their noses. Why not he?

The membership of this church was by far the largest of any in the village, and sometimes the pastor would point with pride, and in a spirit of boasting, to the growing influence of his charge. But the golden-haired, ruby-lipped rector of the little church over the way spitefully remarked that quality was far preferable to quantity any day. Quantity was cheap, troublesome, and unwieldy. Quality took care of itself, and paid his salary promptly. Therefore

he wouldn't exchange membership, even if a very large bonus were offered as an inducement thereto.

A substantial hotel had also found a footing in the village. "The Tavern," as it was called, was a large square brick building, two stories high. The outer wall was covered with a kind of stucco, laid off in great squares, or blocks, and giving it, when new, the appearance of a handsome stone structure. But the action of the weather had caused the stucco to fall away here and there in great flakes. The rain, too, had beaten under and discolored it with ugly spots, and a crack like the zigzag track of a lightning-flash appeared across almost the entire wall.

The proprietor was a good-natured, sleepy-go-easy fellow, who spent his winter mornings in the office, lolling in an old arm-chair before a big log-fire, and his summer afternoons with his dog and horse, under the shadow of the back-shed of the stable.

One room served as office and bar-room. Here was a large old-fashioned fireplace, around which half a dozen lazy, sleepy fellows lounged in rickety arm-chairs. When not asleep, they "chawed" tobacco, smoked clay pipes, and whittled on the remnants of the arms left upon the chairs that still supported their corpulent frames. Now and then they varied the monotony by taking a drink or talking politics,—a theme that never fails to awaken the dor-

mant conversational energies of every true Virginian, especially when under the influence of so potent a beverage as apple-jack.

An inventory of the bar would have shown a dozen bottles placed in a row upon the shelf, with here and there a broken-necked decanter; a cracked, fly-specked mirror; half a dozen decayed or shrivelled lemons; some Dutch cheese; a dingy box of cigars, from which the bartender blew great clouds of dust before offering them to purchasers; and a couple of stone spittoons that needed emptying every day, but were never treated to that process oftener than once a week.

A room under the tavern was occupied as a barber-shop. It was not only a shaving and hair-cutting establishment, but it was the favorite rendezvous, or lounging-place, for the young men of the town. Its big arm-chair was nearly always occupied by some lazy young fellow, who stretched himself therein at full length, and, under a pretence of reading the morning paper, gazed admiringly at his reflection in the large mirror that swung from the wall before him. When he tired of this agreeable pastime, he gave way to some other young man who had patiently awaited his turn to take up the newspaper and inspect his physiognomy reflected in the aforesaid mirror. When this one wearied of

self-contemplation, he too abandoned the seat for some red-haired guest from the country, and soon the fiery moustache with which nature had adorned the upper lip of the rustic was by the barber's art made to wear the hue of the raven's wing.

Hither, too, a certain vain and handsome young lawyer from over the way came some dozen times a day for water to quench an ungovernable thirst, taking good care never to depart without passing in front of the mirror and smoothing his waving locks of black hair. He was trying hard to coax it in graceful ringlets down upon his coat-collar, in imitation of a certain great orator of the day to whom he fancied he bore a striking resemblance.

The most important building in the village was the old court-house, which stood opposite the tavern. It was an imposing structure surrounded by dwarfed maples, and enclosed by an iron fence. A long flight of stone steps led up to the porch, the roof of which was supported by four large brick pillars. The house itself was built of brick, with two wings of the same material. The body was a spacious court-room. The wings were occupied by the grand and petit jurors when sitting in judgment upon the rights of property, or the life and liberty of citizens who were so unfortunate as to be dragged into this temple of justice. The court-house, unlike a certain

ancient temple, was always open to lawyers and litigants. Formerly the court had been presided over by from three to five grave justices of the county. Then followed the military tribunal, after which came a little judge as chief presiding officer.

He was a wiry, nervous, chatty little judge, of wise and venerable appearance. He was proud of the high office for which the people had chosen him, and felt it incumbent upon him to occupy as much of the people's time as possible. He was on the bench early and late. It mattered not who was present. Sometimes only a sad-eyed sheriff paced the porch with leisurely tread, or a lone and seedy lawyer hung his legs over the back of the much-whittled chair before the stand. No matter,—it was sufficient. The little judge held his court, and sat listening with marked gravity to the monotonous voice of the clerk reading the record of the preceding day.

He had never travelled the dusty road of Blackstone's Commentaries, nor wrestled with the problems of contingent remainders, nor delved among the dry reports of the Supreme Courts of the land. He had been schooled in the law by many years of experience as justice of the peace for his native county, and was a living contradiction of that principle of the Constitution of his State which declares that her judges shall be learned in the law. But (to his credit be it

said) he presided with the dignity of a Lord Hale, and questioned the wisdom of our law-makers, or deplored the sometimes folly of the Supreme Court of Appeals, with the gravity of a Lord Eldon. His solemn and lengthy decisions, rendered after the most mature deliberation, often provoked a smile from the legal fraternity, who strove to listen with mock gravity to the words of wisdom that fell from his lips. He was the guardian of the morals of the little community, and hence a great weight must needs always press heavily upon him. He reversed the great fundamental principle of the law that the prisoner at the bar must be presumed innocent of the crime with which he is charged. But, withal, he was an honest, upright, and conscientious little judge. His faults were the natural result of a lack of stern legal training, not of any inherent desire to do aught that might cast a stain upon the judicial ermine.

But the chief attraction around Littleton was the wild beauty and grandeur of the mountains. To the stranger these mountains, spurs of the Alleghany, seemed to be almost within an hour's walk of the village. At their nearest point they lay some ten or a dozen miles to the north. The road thither was tortuous and rugged, and oftentimes so steep as to inspire in the mind of the traveller a sense of imminent peril to life and limb.

With the country at their base, eastward, a scene was presented as of a great natural amphitheatre. Looming up low down in the southwest, and stretching far to the northeast, the lofty range formed almost a complete semicircle. At first scarcely rising above the horizon, it increased in altitude until the greatest height was reached, midway the semicircle, in two great towering peaks of marvellous symmetry of form. From this point there was a corresponding decrease in altitude, until, at the extreme northern limit, the range again dropped to the level of the horizon.

The two grand symmetrical peaks, towering so high above their fellows, were somewhat isolated from the principal range. They were as twin sentinels, standing guard over the village. They were not regarded by the inhabitants as dumb, insensate stone and earth, but with feelings of love and veneration, as if within their massive sides beat two great hearts in sympathy with the village nestled at their feet. The child from his nursery window looked out upon them and laughed with delight. The village youths and maidens were wont to go thither in full summer-time or mellow autumn to climb those rugged heights, or to pour out their love-tales under the friendly shade of oak, and beech, and resinous pine. The traveller toiling up the tortuous ascent paused here and there and slaked his thirst from some spring of living

water, gushing out clear and sweet, amid pepper-grass, and cress, and fragrant mint. Innumerable streams, ever-dashing, never-silent streams, made continual melody as they tumbled in little, silvery cascades down the winding slopes.

Very dear were these familiar, towering heights to the dwellers around their base, but to the long-absent traveller, returning to his native land, weary and foot-sore, and yearning for the calm comforts of a peaceful home, how unspeakably dear! His eyes sparkled with delight and his heart leaped with joy at the very sight. Fondly he gazed upon those well-known forms, and as he gazed all the cherished associations of the olden time came back, and his bosom swelled with feelings of keenest joy. There they stood, unchangeable, eternal. Long had they stood there, silent gazers, looking down into the garrulous streams, the country roads, the farm-yards, and the narrow village street, keeping watch, like two mighty guardians, over the destinies of the people.

Situate a little north of the village, and in sight of these grand old mountains, was the home of Pleasant Waters.

A huge oak stood guard at the little entrance gate to the grounds of the Waters mansion. Its out-stretched arms seemed to point to a narrow lane,

bordered by cedars, which were so smoothly cut across the tops as to suggest a solid and almost impenetrable wall of evergreen. This lane was the means of ingress and egress to and from the grounds for pedestrians or an occasional horseman, but it was too narrow for buggies or carriages. Winding down a gentle slope some hundred yards or more of unbroken surface, it reached a little ravine, over which a rustic bridge was thrown. Here it entered the orchard, or, rather, what had once been the orchard, for only here and there an apple-tree, twisted and bent with age, was seen. Passing through the orchard, beneath the skeleton shade of the venerable trees, the road entered the spacious yard. No fence separated the yard from the orchard. The one merged into the other, the yard proper being distinguished only by the stately forest oaks that marked its outer confines.

To the north, and separated from the yard by a tall fence of sharp-pointed palings, was the public road leading to the mountains. From this latter road the carriage and other vehicles entered the yard by a double gate. From the gate a broad lane passed through an avenue of native oaks to the front of the mansion.

From the west side of the house to the public road extended a line of posts. Along the tops of

these posts a single row of planks was fastened, leaving sufficient room to pass under by slightly stooping. This fence, which was regularly white-washed with each returning spring, was the dividing line between the front and the back yard. In the enclosure behind this rude fence were the kitchen, stable, and other out-houses. Behind these was the garden, and in rear of the garden lay acres of vineyard and grassy slopes, and woodlands stretching in unbroken line to the mountains.

The walk in front of the mansion was circular and bordered by tree-box. Within the circle, and a few yards from the porch, grew a cluster of Norway firs and spruce pines, with here and there a cedar, struggling for existence among the towering evergreens. About the yard, in irregular lines, as nature had arranged them, were the wild cherry, the cedar, and the poplar, side by side with the great forest oaks that stood like a mighty body-guard around the old mansion.

The Virginia creeper had fastened its tendrils here and there in and along the brick wall of the house, and had wellnigh covered the porch down to the very ground. It had even taken firm hold of the blasted limb of an old oak that leaned far over the roof, uniting the old house with the trees themselves of the forest.

The house was of brick, two stories high, and shaped like the letter L. It had large rooms and wide halls, and broad piazzas on every side. It was a house built for solid comfort. The furniture was of the old-fashioned mahogany pattern : bedsteads with posts that towered almost to the ceiling ; chairs with tall straight backs and tables with broad massive leaves ; carpets, home-made and hand-made and not unlike the crazy-quilt of more modern times ; great iron dogs ornamented the fireplaces, and great heaps of wood it took to fill them, but the fire sent forth a heat and a light that warmed and cheered through the long dark winter months. The old clock in the corner ticked monotonously day in and day out, and was wound up only on a Christmas eve. In summer the thrush and the mocking-bird perched and sang in the tree above the porch ; in winter the cat lolled lazily on the hearth-rug, or toyed with the shred of yarn that dropped from the mistress's knitting.

Such a home had Pleasant Waters when he enlisted as a private soldier under the flag of the Southern Confederacy.

CHAPTER III.

COLONEL WILLIAM WATERS, of Littleton, the father of Pleasant, did not earn his title by any act of gallantry on the battle-field. He was the proud commander of the State's militia that mustered to the sound of drum and fife around his native village. Had the opportunity been given him, he would, no doubt, have displayed such prowess as to richly merit the title he bore, for he was a man of unquestioned courage, and he was as patriotic as he was brave.

Colonel Waters's neighbors were accustomed to speak of him as "a remarkable man." By this was meant that he began life under the adverse circumstances of being a poor boy, and by his own unaided exertions attained the proud distinction of being the wealthiest man of his community.

But Colonel Waters's idea of "adverse circumstances" was totally at variance with the generally received notion, for he was wont to say in relating his early experience, "When I began life I had the good fortune to be a poor boy." Though the colonel did not expressly invite his neighbors to

look around and see what the poor boy had achieved, yet it was evident to their minds that he intended that they should so look around whenever he delivered himself of the above sentence. If he was disposed to boast and feel proud of his achievements, he should be pardoned for it. The days of his life had not been idle ones, but filled with hours of busy labor. At the early age of ten he was apprenticed to a mechanic. For many years he worked steadily at his trade, advancing rapidly to the full knowledge of the skilled workman. The few spare moments of his busy life were spent in reading such works of history and general information as his limited means could supply. Thus he early acquired a fondness for, and habit of, reading that was afterwards a source of great pleasure as well as profit to him.

At his majority he found himself in possession of a little fortune of several hundred dollars. With this he leased a dingy storehouse on Main Street, stocked it with goods, and hung out the sign,

WILLIAM WATERS, MERCHANT.

He kept what might be truly termed a "miscellaneous stock," or what the commercial world would denominate a "general store;" goods for the town's folks, goods for the rural populace, goods for trade,

barter, or hard cash. Here were coffee from the West Indies, sugar from the Southern plantations, molasses from New Orleans, tea from somewhere; salt fish, generally North Carolina herring, in barrels behind the counters; tallow candles, and a few wax candles for "quality" weddings; dried fruit from the country, and Dutch cheese from the valley. There were great piles of golden butter in oblong or egg-shaped rolls, heaped in wooden trays on the counter. On each tray was a wooden paddle with which customers might chip off a piece of butter and touch it to the end of the tongue to test its age and quality. There were boots and shoes, mostly of the brogan pattern, which were worn by the slaves; woodenware, tinware, hardware, calico, Kentucky jeans, and homespun socks and counterpanes. A horse-collar and a blind-bridle hung before the door, and a cone-shaped stack of grindstones rested on the pavement in front of the store.

Above the unattractive old place he kept bachelor's quarters, and his meals were served from the store. There were two other stores in the village, but Mr. Waters kept the largest stock, and soon he had the largest trade. He furnished the slave-owners of the country with all their needed supplies. Once a year the planters brought their produce to market and settled their accounts. At such times Mr. Waters

was rich in the currency of his country, but, like the thrifty merchant he was, he took the stage-coach to Richmond, and replenished his depleted stock with everything the country-side was likely to need for another twelve months to come. Year by year his trade increased, and after the lapse of a few years William Waters was reputed one of the wealthy men of the little community, but William Waters was still a bachelor.

One fine morning in the month of October, 18—, he was standing in front of his door humming to himself an old familiar air. He had just finished sweeping the pavement in front of the store, and had hung up the blind-bridle, the horse-collar, and the brogan shoes to tempt the rural customer as he rode into town. The stage-coach from the east drove up with a great flourish and stopped before the tavern.

The arrival of the stage-coach was always attended by much confusion and bustle. This morning there was an unusual amount of excitement. William Waters noted this, and, approaching the stage, proceeded to investigate the cause. A lone female figure stepped down from the coach, and stood in the crowd of gaping men and boys. She was a handsome woman: a brunette, with a well-developed figure, a round, plump face, and a bright color, which

was heightened by the coolness of the early morning. Her carriage was erect, and there was about her an air of independence that made the village people think her "proud." She was not abashed by the gaze of the crowd, but proceeded at once to ask questions relative to the school for young ladies, known as the Littleton Female Seminary.

"Ah," said Mr. Waters, stepping up to the stranger, "you are the young lady they have been expecting over there for some time?"

"Yes, sir. Will some gentleman be kind enough to direct me thither?" was the response, delivered in a voice of singular sweetness,—so thought William Waters. He was too gallant a man to refuse this modest request.

Yes, he would not only direct her, but go himself and show her the way, "seeing how it was that she was alone."

"Who *was* she?" asked the whole village. She was simply Nancy Pleasants, from the State of Rhode Island, come down to take charge of the departments of music, French, and painting in the Littleton Female Seminary.

In that brief walk to the seminary, William Waters was charmed with her artless manner, her open countenance, her sweet, musical voice, her sprightly talk, and that certain indescribable air of

independence so foreign to those with whom he associated.

By and by he learned that she was not only quite accomplished, but, what was more, she combined with her accomplishments that most essential trait, a plentiful supply of common sense. She sang exquisitely, so her pupils said; could draw and paint; performed on the piano, and taught the rudiments of French. She was also familiar with the recipes of the cookery book, and knew the prices of nearly everything usually kept in stock by the merchants of the town.

A lady of such beauty, such varied accomplishments, and such rare business sense, could not fail to attract the attention of the marriageable young men of the town. Among her numerous admirers, none was more ardent than William Waters. Being strictly a man of business, he lost no time in his offer of marriage to the young school-marm, who, likewise, being a lady of business, hastened to accept the offer.

With no more delay than was necessary, William Waters and Nancy Pleasants were married at the village church, and at once settled down, or rather up, above the store, where they began the prosaic process of house-keeping.

His fortune increased, and so did his family. Two sons were born to them during the time of

their humble lodging above the store. Pleasant was the elder ; William was two years younger. A short time after the birth of his younger son, Mr. Waters, who had arrived through successive gradations to the proud title of colonel of militia, purchased a few acres of valuable land upon the northern limit of the village. Upon this property he built for his future home a large and substantial brick residence, described in the last chapter. When the mansion was completed, Colonel Waters sold his entire stock of merchandise, retired with his family to this delightful retreat, and devoted his whole attention, from that time to the beginning of the civil war, to the management of the village bank, of which he was president and principal stockholder.

Within a year after his removal to his new home there was born to him a daughter, who was christened Verena, but who was known to the villagers as "little Winnie Waters."

The parents and their three children, with half a dozen faithful servants, made up the happy household at the Waters mansion.

Colonel Waters spared no means for the proper education of his children. The boys, as soon as they had mastered the rudiments taught in the village school, were placed at college. The daughter was taught under the parental roof by the devoted

mother, who was unwilling to expose this pure and innocent girl to the tender mercies of a female college.

At the beginning of the war there was no happier family in all the land than the one that gathered around the hearthstone of the Waters mansion. From that time dark clouds began to appear in the peaceful sky and to lower upon the prosperous and happy home.

At the first sound of war, the two brothers left college and returned to their home. Here they remained a short time for preparation, and then enlisted in the army under the command of General Joseph E. Johnston.

William, the younger son, was killed at the battle of the Wilderness. From this severe shock Colonel Waters never recovered. Shortly after the death of his son William, the father, too, fell a victim to the great conqueror. Pleasant returned home at the death of his father, and laid to rest his mortal remains in the family burial-ground. Having comforted, as best he could, the desolate and grief-stricken widow, he hastened back to the post of duty. Here he remained until the final act in the dreadful drama was over.

Such, briefly, is the history of the Waters family down to the time at which this simple narrative opens.

CHAPTER IV.

It was early in the month of June that Pleasant Waters, footsore, ragged, and hungry, arrived in sight of his native village. His faithful horse, that had served him so well through four years of the war, perished by the roadside, and the master was forced to complete his journey afoot. As, after toiling slowly up the old dirt road, he reached the summit of the hill that overlooks the village of Littleton, and stood there with the freshly-blowing breezes from the far-off mountains kissing his dust-stained cheek, he felt that it was the happiest moment of his life. He threw himself on the sod under the shade of an old chestnut-tree, and lay gazing in silent rapture upon the magnificent prospect of mountain and valley, upon familiar field and woodland, and upon the village, stretched along the plain, with its sun-tipped spires pointing heavenward, and its lovely homes under leafy aisles of maple, oak, and elm. Whatever changes had taken place in the village were concealed beneath the dense June foliage. Certainly there was no change in the wild beauty and

grandeur of the mountains stretching to northward, in unbroken chain, far beyond the river James.

As the tired soldier lay beneath the shade of the old chestnut, upon whose knotted limbs he had played in his boyish days, and looked out upon the mountains rising in the purple distance towards the soft June sky, they seemed infinitely more beautiful and grand, and tender and homelike, than ever before. Had it been possible, he would have stretched forth his arms to embrace and caress them for very love's sake. Keen, indeed, was his delight as his heart went out to these familiar old heights, a feeling of joy akin to that experienced at the meeting of long-parted friends.

There was Harkin's Hill, with its patch of cleared land around the careening old tobacco-barn. There was the Devil's Backbone, with its long ridge of stunted oaks, distinctly outlined against the blue sky. And there was the Devil's Wood-Yard, where the fallen timber, shattered by the lightning-flash, or uprooted by the powerful blast of the storm, lay in tangled heaps upon the rugged heights.

The mountains, the hills, and the valleys were the same. But was the little village that lay smiling in the sun that day the same as on the day he left its peaceful shades? Had the war's rude shocks disturbed the quiet of its inhabitants? What changes

awaited his coming? What sacred spot was desecrated? What beloved homes in ruins? What familiar faces missing?

Waters arose and bent his steps towards the village. He entered a narrow, unfrequented part that led to the main street by way of the institute.

The institute had been the pride and boast of the village folk in *ante-bellum* days. It was here that the village youths were prepared for college. Up to the time of the war it boasted of able professors and a goodly number of students upon its annual roll. It was a large, square, brick building, situated at a sufficient elevation to command a view of the village street from end to end.

When Waters reached the grounds, he paused to look again upon this time-honored institution. Not a vestige of the fence that once encircled it was left. Of the beautiful and ornamental shade-trees only one here and there remained. These were bruised and broken in limb, and seemed to be in the last stages of decay. The warm June winds and sun had coaxed out only a few scattering leaves upon the drooping and half-broken branches. The green blinds that once graced the double row of windows now hung loosely against the battered brick wall. Some, with only a few slats remaining, flapped idly in the wind against the glassless, sashless windows.

The door-way was wide open. The door itself lay battered upon the ground. The yard, once smooth and grassy, was washed by the rains, furrowed by wagon-wheels, and cut up by the tread of horses and cattle. The dear old halls of learning had become a polluted place and were only a fit home for bats and owls.

The institute had been converted into a hospital for the Confederate sick. Now it was abandoned and made a part of the common. The campus, where the students were wont to make merry sport at football and other games, was now the resting-place of hundreds of Confederate dead.

The institute, with its forlorn and desolate surroundings, presented a picture too painful to dwell upon. Waters, therefore, hastened on into the old street with its long line of dwelling-houses, the monotony of which was only relieved by an occasional church, or grocery-store, or snack-house. He passed on until he reached the village post-office where he got the mail when a boy.

In the door stood the same dried-up little woman, old, wrinkle-faced, and scantily clad,—she was always scantily clad,—whom he had seen coming daily for letters before the war. She was coming still. Hour after hour she would stand patiently waiting in the door of the post-office. She never received any

letters. At any rate, no one ever heard of her receiving any. She was daily expecting a letter, she said, from somewhere, but exactly where she could not tell. Ten years ago she paid her daily visit to the post-office. She never missed a day. No matter how cold or how hot it was, no matter how windy the weather or how sunny, in rain, or hail, or shine, she came. There she stood to-day, patiently waiting and watching. "No letter to-day," coldly responded the postmaster, just as he had responded upon the day before and upon all the other days before as far back as he could remember.

Waters left the old woman standing in the post-office door and walked on by the tavern with its long porch, where sat old Mr. Simmons gazing idly at the red walls of the court-house just opposite, or at the group of ragged children playing marbles in the court-house square. At a stand hard by an old darkey was peddling cakes and pies to the hungry urchins at a cent apiece. Waters was hungry enough to devour with a relish the old huckster's whole stock in hand at one meal, but he hastened on, and turned into the street that led to his home. At the corner he paused a moment to watch the merry sport of some happy, bright-eyed little boys and girls who were romping before the village school-house. An old lady, dressed in a much-faded calico, the skin drawn

tightly over her sharp features, and her hair drawn tightly into a little cue behind, thrust her head far out of the narrow window and yelled, in keen, harsh accents, "Do ye hear me, ye noisy set of jackanapes? Come in, I say. Come in this minute, and git ter yer books!"

It was the same old lady who had taught at the same old school-house for many years past. There were the same sharp features, the same harsh, shrieking voice, as when Pleasant, a little boy, dangled his bare legs and feet from the rude bench before her. The old men of the village had been her pupils. So had their children and their children's children.

Within the school-room, all the boys and girls were promiscuously huddled together on rude benches, where they were permitted to learn their lessons "out loud." To the passer-by it sounded like the busy hum of the busiest of bee-hives. To the visitor who chanced to enter it was a pandemonium. While the pupils were thus preparing their lessons the good old lady attended to her domestic duties in an adjoining room, coming in now and then to hear a recitation, or, more often, to punish noisy and disobedient by bumping their heads together. She did her own cooking and washing, drove bargains with the vegetable venders, made cakes and pies for tea-parties and

picnics, imparted instruction and dispensed discipline to the village children.

Doubtless the children of her school did not learn so rapidly as those who attended the modern kindergarten. Their little faces were not pale or sad or thoughtful, but plump and ruddy, brimming full and running over with mischief. They could not tell you, at the age of five, who discovered America, nor repeat the multiplication-table backwards at eight, nor discuss history, music, and art at ten. Not a bit of it. But, turned loose in their own free, native air, they excelled in rolling the hoop or jumping the rope, in playing ball or running races, in breaking colts or fighting clods battles by moonlight on the pike, at risk of life and limb. And from these boys came men hardy and strong, and ready for life's burdens,—men valiant in war and at home, scions of a noble race. And from the girls came devoted wives, mothers, and daughters, whose whole lives were spent in unselfish deeds and labors of love; who followed steadily the pathway of duty, never faltering, but going life's dull daily round without a murmur or a reproach.

The school passed, Waters left the street and walked down a narrow lane, the southern entrance to the Waters mansion. This entrance of late years was little used. The shrubbery had run wild, until it

almost choked up the lane and cut off the view of the house. On the southern border grew a hedge of Osage-orange. This hedge had been so long neglected that here and there the prickly branches shot up tall and slender, and some of the bushes had grown into trees. In places the branches grew horizontally, crossing the lane and interlapping with the shrubbery on the other side. Such places were tedious and difficult of passage. The way must be carefully picked, or the pedestrian was in danger of being severely pricked by the seasoned thorns upon the dead limbs of the Osage-orange.

At times Waters became so badly entangled that he was obliged to stop and extricate himself before proceeding farther. The ragged condition of his clothing made it an easy prey for every thorny bush with which it came in contact. He had scarcely proceeded a quarter of the length of the lane before he thought he must retreat and try a more circuitous but less difficult route. While debating with himself what was best to be done, he caught the sound of approaching footsteps.

Next moment he was face to face with a blushing maiden with a pair of dark brown eyes that peeped out from under a pretty pink-lined sun-bonnet. Her naturally ruddy complexion was greatly heightened by the heat of the warm June sun. The bonnet, its

untied strings dangling carelessly down, hung loosely upon her head, allowing her dark brown hair to fall in graceful waves around her neck and shoulders. A highly-colored calico dress adorned her person, and her hands were encased in plain but neat cotton mittens. Her plump, well-rounded arms were bare to the elbow, and in their embrace was a huge cluster of wild-flowers and ferns pressed tightly against her bosom.

The girl was evidently startled at this unexpected meeting with a dust-stained soldier in so out-of-the-way spot. Her look was so wild and frightened that he expected to see her, like some wood-nymph, turn suddenly back and run off to the forest where she belonged. Indeed, she did instinctively turn to retrace her steps, when her dress became entangled in the Osage-orange and held her fast. In her excited and hurried effort to free herself from this embarrassing situation her bonnet fell at her feet, and the whole cluster of flowers and ferns was scattered upon the ground.

Waters, refined and chivalrous as he was, at once saw and understood her fright and embarrassment, and hastened to disarm her of any fear by offering to extricate her from her unfortunate entanglement. In such gentle and expeditious manner did he proceed to the task—which was indeed no task—that, almost

before she was aware of it, her skirts were disentangled, her bonnet replaced, and the flowers restored to the embrace of her faultless arm.

She blushed as she thanked him in a voice of unusual sweetness, but before he could reply she had passed down the lane, and was hidden from view by the intervening foliage.

"So like a pleasant dream," thought he, "sweet but fleeting. I wonder who the little beauty can be? Doubtless I have seen her before and have forgotten her. Time passes so swiftly, and these village girls grow so rapidly. Only a year or two, and they have grown out of one's knowledge. But how could I forget such a little beauty as this?"

He reached the old stile over which the yard was entered. Three or four short steps more and his feet would rest again on the sacred soil of his home. How his heart beat with expectation! Oh, the joy of it! Back once more upon the old tramping-ground! Even the inanimate things around him, the insensate trees and stones, were like the faces of familiar friends. So touched was he at the sight of the old oaks that he could have embraced them and spoken to them, as if they possessed heart and soul, and were capable of responding to all the tender emotions that welled up in his own heart and soul. Here, upon that one, he traced the rude letters cut with his own jack-knife,

and there was hardly a limb of this one that had not felt his weight.

But where was Brutus, the watch-dog, that he did not come bounding and barking to meet him? What meant this strange stillness? Except the birds singing in the trees there were no signs of life about the premises, no barking of dogs, no tramping of horses, no merry romping of negro children upon the lawn. Another step and the shrubbery would be cleared, the gravel walk reached, and the old house brought into view.

The walk was reached, and there—he stood as one rooted to the spot. His eyes were fixed steadily upon the scene before him. His senses were bewildered, his vision dimmed, and the world seemed to spin around him like a top. His limbs, already weakened by the fatigue of a long journey, trembled beneath him, and he sank like one limp and lifeless upon the green sod,—sank down with a feeling of utter loneliness, of unutterable despair.

Pleasant Waters had looked upon the naked walls, upon the charred and blackened ruins of his long-cherished and beloved old homestead.

CHAPTER V.

“WHO dat comin’ down de paff yonder? One dem hongry sojers, I spec’. Bless gracious, dis ole darkey hain’t got no vittels for herself, let ’lone fur yuther folks. He can’t git nuffin’ here, sho’. He jes’ well be totin’ dem lazy bones er his’n somewhar else. Dat he had, fur er fac’. He p’intedly ain’t gwine ter git nuffin’ ter eat from dis house. Sho’s you bawn he ain’t!”

These were the remarks of old Aunt Emily as she stood in the door of her cabin, some hundred yards from the ruins of the Waters mansion. They were addressed to no particular individual, unless to the speaker herself. She was in the habit of carrying on, almost daily, long and spirited conversations with herself.

At the time of these remarks no other living creature was in or immediately about the cabin, except the dog lying under the ash-hopper, too old or too lazy to move except at meal-times, and a fat hen cooling herself by stirring up the rich black dirt of the wood-pile.

It was a daily occurrence, shortly after the sur-

render of the Confederate army, for soldiers, journeying homeward, to stop at this humble cabin and beg for a cup of milk or a piece of cold bread. Aunt Emily, a kind, generous old soul, had given of her penury until giving ceased to be a virtue. The tax upon her scanty store was too heavy to bear longer, and she felt compelled from sheer necessity to close her ear to every appeal of this kind. The law of self-preservation was as much the first law of nature with the old darkey as it was with her white brethren. Therefore, when she saw the soldier slowly approaching her humble dwelling, she delivered herself of the above remarks with an earnestness and an emphasis that were meant to carry conviction to the imaginary hearer.

But, as the soldier approached the door, Aunt Emily thought she discerned something familiar in the form and gait of the man in gray. She drew forth a pair of "specs" with a greasy string tied to each end of the brass rims, and adjusted them to her very flat nose. For a moment she gazed intently at the ragged and dust-stained soldier, and then her whole face lit up with an expression of joy as she threw up her hands and exclaimed, in a wild burst of astonishment,—

"Bless de Lawd, ef dat ain't Mars Pleas, done come back from de war! Sho's you bawn, hit's Mars Pleas! God bless de chile!"

The next moment the old darkey rushed out into the yard and threw her long, bony arms around the ragged and toil-worn soldier and kissed his dust-stained forehead. How she rejoiced at his return! And she gave vent to her joy in tears and kisses and embraces. As Waters looked into the kindly face of the old darkey, and saw and felt the genuineness of her joy at his return, tears gathered in the eyes of the stern soldier too. God bless the good, kindly old soul! How could she forget him? She had nursed him in infancy; she had rocked his cradle and sung over him her simple lullaby; she had taught his little feet to walk and his little tongue to prattle; she had watched over him, day and night, almost with the affection and tenderness of a mother. She was his "black mammy." He was her "chile." No wonder she rejoiced at his coming. No wonder she was quick to recognize him, and rushed out to meet him, and threw her arms about him, and caressed him, and kissed him, and laughed and cried, and wrung her hands over him in very ecstasy of joy.

"Hit do make dis ole darkey's heart so glad ter see her chile back in de ole place ag'in. I knowed you de berry minute I laid eyes on you. I 'lowed ter myself dat dar was Mars Pleas' comin' down de paff yonder, en sho' 'nuff here you is."

"Yes, Aunt Emily," said Pleasant, as he sat down

upon the green sod before the door. "Yes, I've come home to stay this time."

"Dat's er fac', Mars Pleas. Dat's de way ter talk. You's been away too long already. Dat you is. Some mighty cu'se things happen sence you been gone from here. De old place ain't w'at it used ter be, Mars Pleas. 'Taint w'at it used to be. No, dat it 'taint."

Pleasant stretched himself comfortably on the grass and let Aunt Emily's volubility have full sway. He had known nothing of the destruction of his home until his return. The scene that met his gaze that morning was a severe shock to him, and one for which he was wholly unprepared. As yet he was ignorant of the fate of his mother and sister. Were they dead or alive? This was a fearful question to ask. Must he ask it now? No, not now. In the course of Aunt Emily's talk she would doubtless tell the tidings, welcome or unwelcome. And so he asked no questions, but listened eagerly, and trembled with a kind of strange fear, while the garrulous old darkey, in her own peculiar way, told the story of her experience during those eventful days that marked his last absence from his native village.

"Lawd, chile, dem wuz mighty squally times 'bout here; sho's you baun, dey wuz. Ole missus, she wuz powerful skeered when dem Yankees come er ridin' t'rough de yard jes' as thick as blackberries in de

summer-time. Dey bruck open de cawn-'ouse an' stole all de cawn; dey bruck open de hen-'ouse an' stole all de chickens; an' dey bruck open de smoke-'ouse, but dey didn't fin' no meat dar. No, sir, not er poun' did dey fin',—for why? 'Kase old missus too smart for dem fool Yankees, dat she wuz. An' when she knowed dey wuz er comin', she tuck an' had all dat meat packed up, 'kase I ho'ped do it myself, an' me an' Abe toted it way off ter Duiguid's Holler, an' tuck an' hid it under de big rock. An' we carried all ole missus' silber an' t'ings, we did, an' hid dat too. An' Abe he stayed down dar in Duiguid's Holler tell de Yankees wuz driv clear outen de country. An' den he fotched all dem t'ings back ter ole missus ag'in. Ole missus wuz too smart for dem Yankees dat time, sho! an' so wuz me an' Abe."

And here the old negress chuckled over the shrewdness displayed in foiling the wily enemy. Meanwhile, Pleasant awaited in awful suspense what should follow.

"When dem Yankees couldn't fine' nuffin' wuff havin' in de smoke-'ouse, what 'd dey do? Dey jes' git mad, an' sot fire ter it an' burnt it smack up. Den dis old darkey 'gin ter git skeered sho' 'nuff, 'kase she fear'd dey gwine ter set fire ter dis here cabin de nex' minute, an' maybe kill de old nigger, for nuffin' on God's yearth but 'kase dey couldn't git

nuffin' ter eat outen de smoke-'ouse. But Lawd, honey, dey jis' march up ter de big house, smack up ter de po'ch, whar ole missus wuz settin' in de big arm-cheer, an' Miss Winnie 'side her, lookin' as uncon-sarned as ef nuffin' wuz gwine ter happen. But Miss Winnie she tuck on powerful when dey tuck de keys an' tol' 'em ter git outen de house, for dey wuz gwine ter sot fire ter it right away. But dey didn't do dat tell dey had done s'arched it from bottom ter top an' tuck away all dey could tote, an' den dey sot fire ter de big house right dar 'fore our eyes. Dis ole darkey nebber spec' ter lib ter see er nuther sech day as dat. 'Fore God, she hope she never will. 'Fore de sun wuz down dat day dar wan't nuffin lef' of de ole house standin', 'cep'en dem black walls you see yonder, an' dey's ready ter fall ter de groun'."

Aunt Emily paused, overcome by the recollection of that dreadful day. Pleasant instinctively turned and gazed upon the wreck of his once happy home. The broad beams of the June sun gilded the cracked and smoke-stained walls. The ivy was scorched and shrivelled and dead. Here and there the Virginia creeper was putting forth fresh leaves, and fastening its tendrils anew in some chance crack, or struggling for life amid the half-buried ruins of the old edifice.

The fate of the little family that once lived there was still unknown to Pleasant. Thus far, Aunt Emily

had disclosed nothing that could throw any light upon what he was most anxious to know. Aunt Emily resumed her story.

"Miss Winnie, *de chile*, she cried like her heart w'ud break, but ole missus she jes' hilt up her head an' walked outen dat yard jes' as proud like as ef she 'spised de sight of dem Yankees, an' wan't beholden ter 'em fur nuffin'. Dat she did, fur er fac'. She went ober ter Mars Baldwin's, her an' Miss Winnie, an' dar dey stayed tell de Yankees wuz driv outen de lan'. Den Abe he fotched back eberyting from Duiguid's Holler, an' put it under de office, in de cellar, 'kase de Yankees nebber to'ched de office. Den Miss Winnie an' her ma come back, an' move inter de office, an' fix up de two rooms, an' dar dey is dis berry minute. I does de cookin' an' washin', an' Abe he 'ten's ter de gyarden an' feeds de cow jes' de same as ever."

Pleasant sprang to his feet like one electrified. Was it possible that he had remained here all this time within sight, and almost within hearing, of those whose fate he so longed to know?

"Yes, *chile*," continued Aunt Emily, not noticing his sudden movement, "dar dey is ter dis berry day, right yonder in de ole office, beyont de walls of de big house. An' here's yer ole Aunt Em'ly, ready ter ho'pe 'em as long as she's got bref in her body."

But Pleasant was up and on his way to the little

frame building, which stood some fifty yards in rear of the old house, before Aunt Emily had finished her sentence. She once more adjusted her "specs," and as she stood in her cabin door, gazing with beaming countenance at his receding form, she muttered, "Ole missus will be so glad—so glad. Dat she will. Dat she will. Thank de Lawd!" And she withdrew into her humble dwelling.

CHAPTER VI.

NOT more than fifty yards from the ruins of the mansion stood a small frame building, one story and a half high. Before the war it had been occupied by the boys as a kind of study and sleeping-apartment. Nearly all large residences in Virginia, and especially in the country, had near them in the large yards a small frame or brick building, similar to the one here mentioned. This building was inappropriately termed the "office." The office had luckily escaped the fate of the mansion-house, but the escape was a narrow one. Nothing saved it but a favorable turn of the wind, which, blowing from the east, carried the flames in an opposite direction. This building and Aunt Emily's cabin were the only houses remaining on the premises at the close of the war that were at all suitable for residences.

After the burning of their house, Mrs. Waters, with her daughter Winnie, who was then about fifteen years old, moved into the office, and fitted it up with such furniture as her scanty means could provide. With the assistance of Abe and Aunt Emily the two ladies managed to find a bare living.

It was thither that Pleasant directed his steps when he parted from Aunt Emily at the cabin door. As he left her he felt stronger than he had felt for days; but now, as he placed his hand upon the rude fence that encircled the little building, and was about to enter the little wicket-gate before the door that was already wide open to receive him, his frame trembled, his knees shook, and his heart throbbed with emotion.

It was not by fear or grief that he was affected, but by a deep and overpowering sense of peace and home. The toils and dangers of a soldier's life were about to end forever upon the threshold of home, and joy and rest and peace were come back to abide for all time. It was sweet, passing sweet, to stand once more under the shadow of those familiar oaks and breathe the pure air of heaven, and feel its cooling kiss on his heated brow. The rude staff that had served him on his long journey was laid beside the fence, and the tired soldier stepped into the yard. A strutting cock, surrounded by a bevy of hens, turned his half-shut eye for a moment on the strange form, then uttered a shrill cry of alarm, and vanished with the hens around the house. A large gray cat, lying upon the door-mat, got up and came softly out to meet him and rubbed her furry sides against his dusty boots. A robin, skipping lightly along the fence, paused and cast shy glances at the ragged soldier. The mocking-

bird, imprisoned in the cage beside the door, stopped his gushing song and eyed the stranger curiously.

As Pleasant looked at the bird in the cage he could not help thinking of the great joy the poor prisoner would experience if restored to the glorious light and liberty of his own free native air. Instinctively he stretched out his hand to open wide the door and set the poor prisoner free, when the bird ruffled its feathers and pecked angrily at the hand that would free it. Pleasant drew back, and, casting his eyes on the sill of the cottage door, caught sight of his own name rudely traced long years ago. How strange the characters looked to-day! Each letter stood out like some long-forgotten scene suddenly and unexpectedly brought to mind. Hardly a decade had passed since he carved those letters there, but what eventful years had they been! Years full fraught with direful calamities to individuals and to nations alike. He crossed the threshold and stood upon the clean, sanded floor. No familiar voice greeted him; no footsteps approached him. The ticking of the old clock in the corner was the only sound familiar to his ears. The old face looked kindly upon him to-day, and the huge pendulum swung with the same regularity as when he used to sit by the fire and watch it through the long winter evenings. A current of cool air blew through the open door and rustled the cur-

tain that hung by the window. The old arm-chair stood invitingly near. He sat down and cast his eyes about the room.

The furniture consisted of a few split-bottomed chairs, the work of old Abe, the homespun window-curtain, plain but neat, and a pine centre-table, upon which lay a worn album, a few scattered letters, and some photographs of the family and of friends. Pictures of battle-scenes and of the dead heroes of the Confederacy adorned the walls. Upon the mantel-piece were a cracked vase, filled with wild-flowers from the woods, a small plain mirror, and two bright brass candlesticks. The iron dogs that stood in the fireplace were almost hid by the fresh green asparagus that covered them.

A mighty contrast was this to the grand old brick mansion, with its polished walls adorned with steel engravings, its richly-carpeted floors, and its long, airy halls, its fine old mahogany furniture, its broad, old-fashioned fireplaces, and, withal, its air of ease and unostentatious comfort. An humble home, indeed, had Pleasant entered to-day.

“But here was peace, that peace which home can yield.
The grasshopper, the partridge in the field,
And ticking clocks were all at once become
The substitute for clarion fife and drum.”

The sound of familiar voices in the yard fell upon his ear. He arose from the chair. A moment afterwards the sound of approaching footsteps came from the adjoining room. The door was opened. Two shadows fell athwart the sunlit floor. Two bright faces beamed in upon him. And then the worn and tattered soldier felt the quick, tender embrace of a mother's arms, and a sister's warm kisses of affection upon his sunburnt forehead.

There was joy in the humble home that day!

CHAPTER VII.

THE sun was fairly up when Pleasant arose from his bed the next morning. The family had long been astir in the adjoining room. Aunt Emily was humming snatches of an old plantation song as she busied herself in preparation for breakfast in the kitchen. Pleasant threw open the window, and looked out across the wide expanse of field and forest. The soft blue mountains loomed up in the clear distance. The wild, picturesque beauty of those magnificent heights, standing out pure and fresh in the June sunlight, was to him an inspiration. He walked out into the yard and bared his brow to the refreshing breeze. The morning was matchless supreme. The earth smiled, and there was peace.

From tree and bush the birds contributed to the sylvan melody. The wood-thrush was winding its golden horn in the tree overhead. The blue-bird, its notes falling like drops of rain, was calling cheerily to its mate. The robins piped and screamed, and chased one another from tree to tree. The song-sparrow trilled its little ditty. The woodpecker beat its reveille.

Nature's face beamed resplendent that morning, but behind the smiling countenance there was much of gloom and sadness. The old mansion, the home of his youth, was in ruins. The garden, once so luxuriant in its growth of fruits, flowers, and vegetables, was overgrown with running briars and weeds. The neglected vineyard was a tangled mass of decayed and fruitless vines. The orchard, long at the mercy of depredations from within and without, presented the appearance of having been the scene of many a pitched battle, from which it had come out bruised in body, broken and shattered in limb, and stripped of fruit and foliage. The rich grass and clover had disappeared from lawn and meadow, and in their stead flourished the bush and the bramble. The substantial fence that once enclosed the premises had given place to a mere make-shift that scarcely deserved the name. The posts of the front gate were standing, but the gate was gone. In its stead, a couple of rude poles crossed like the letter X served to keep the old family horse from straying from home.

Old Charley, as the horse was called, was nibbling the sprigs of grass that grew among the rocks and in the corners of the rickety fence. Uncle Abe was stealthily approaching him, one hand stretched out invitingly towards him, the other, which was concealed behind him, holding fast a blind-bridle. Old Charley

eyed the negro curiously awhile, then, snuffing the air, trotted off at a brisk rate with his head and tail lifted high in the air.

"Now, see dar," murmured Uncle Abe. "Dat hoss do bang all de critters I ever seed. He knows de plow' ar' waitin' fur him in de gyarden. Co'se he do. 'Kase no longer 'n yestiddy he lemme walk up ter him an' rub he head and pat he side. I hadn't come fur him ter work den, an' de rascal knowed it. Now look how he do. He h'ist his tail in de elements an' run jes' de same as if he didn't know me from de man in de moon. I lay, ole feller, ef dis nigger do git his han's on you ag'in, he show you who you foolin' wid! Dat he will!"

"Well, Uncle Abe," said Pleasant, coming suddenly upon the old negro, and interrupting his soliloquy, "what is all that you have been saying about old Charley?"

Uncle Abe turned with a sharp "Who dat?" upon the speaker, and his whole face lit up with a beam of joy as he recognized his long absent young master standing in the path before him.

"'Fore de Lawd, ef here ain't Mars Pleas! As sure's I'm er live nigger it's Mars Pleas! How you do, Mars Pleas?—how you do?" And the old negro's brawny hand grasped the hand of his young master. "Well, well, I nebber 'spec'd ter lib ter see de day."

"Yes," said Pleasant, "thanks to a kind Providence, I am back again at the old place."

"De ole 'oman tole me, when I got in las' night from de Quarter Place, dat Mars Pleas done come back lookin' jes' as nat'ral as ever. An' sho' 'nuff here you is. I 'lowed ter come down yearly dis mawnin' ter ax arter you. Hit's mighty well you come back, Mars Pleas. Hit's mighty well, fur t'ings ain't been gwine on de same here as dey used ter. No, sir, fur er fac' dey ain't. Ole Abe, he's been er helpin' 'long all he can, but de ole nigger gittin' mighty shaklin' heself you know, an' he can't do much."

Uncle Abe paused to wipe the sweat from his brow with the palm of his hand, and then he looked around for Charley. But Charley was out of sight under an old apple-tree, where he stood with eyes half shut, keeping off the flies with an occasional switch of his tail or a stamp of his clumsy foot.

"Dar now," exclaimed Uncle Abe, upon discovering that Charley had disappeared, "whar dat hoss done gone? I boun' I'll fotch up wid him yit."

He was about to start in search of the truant, when Pleasant stopped him and bade him not to mind about Charley for the present. There were other more important matters that he wished to talk about, and he knew of no better opportunity to question Abe about his knowledge of the condition of affairs at home.

Abe must know a good deal, for he was an honest, thrifty old darkey, and almost the entire management of affairs at the Waters place had been intrusted to him since the death of Colonel Waters.

Without entering into a minute detail of the conversation between master and servant, it may here be stated for the information of the reader that Pleasant learned that morning that the little family, now dependent upon him, had been stripped of everything except the house that sheltered them and some poor land, for the cultivation of which they had neither means nor labor. The train of circumstances leading to the impoverished condition of the family was such as no foresight on their part could have averted. It was the inevitable consequence of the war. This family was only an instance of hundreds that suffered the same disaster. Colonel Waters died possessed of a considerable estate, both real and personal, but the bulk of his property consisted of slaves. He left also a large amount of bank stock, and moneys deposited in the banking institution, of which he had long been president. His real estate was small compared with his personalty. It consisted of his town residence and a plantation of several hundred acres, lying six or eight miles north of the village. The plantation was known as "The Brook Farm," and it was here that most of the slaves were quartered.

Colonel Waters had great confidence in the judgment and sound practical sense of his wife, and knowing the uncertainty of the duration of the war and the strong probability that his son might never return, thought it wise and proper by his last will and testament to devise and bequeath all of his property, consisting of lands, slaves, stocks, moneys, etc., of every kind and description whatsoever, to his beloved wife Nancy Pleasant Waters, with full power to dispose of the same, by deed or will, as she should deem best. Having made this disposition of his estate, he calmly laid down the burden of life, happy in the thought that those most near and dear to him would never suffer any of the privations of poverty, but, so long as they lived, would continue to enjoy all the comforts of a well-provided home.

Alas! how fickle is fortune, and how impotent is man to foresee and meet the impending fate of the future! Scarcely had the mortal remains of the testator been laid at rest before the estate he had accumulated with such skilful hands began to crumble and disappear. Bank stock and money depreciated at a rate that was astounding. At the close of the war they were not worth the paper upon which they were written. The slaves, likewise, were lost to their owners.

At one fell swoop the bulk of the splendid estate

was gone or become as nothing. Besides all this, the real estate, the only property remaining, was so impoverished and exhausted, owing to the constant demands upon it for the support of the slaves from year to year, as to be almost worthless.

Indeed, Mrs. Waters had been compelled, owing to the depreciated value of the currency and the demands made upon her for supplies, for support of the slaves and other expenses, incident to her condition, to entail a considerable debt upon the landed estate. Therefore when Pleasant returned, he found himself without money or property.

His mother, under the will of her late husband, was still the owner of the homestead and plantation, and, Pleasant being the only son, it was naturally presumed that he would inherit whatever of the property remained after his mother's death. This, however, was contingent and *in futuro*. The impoverished condition of affairs could not have been prevented by any foresight on his part, nor was it due to any lack of sound judgment on the part of others.

He had cause to reproach neither himself nor others. Sufficient was it to know that he must go back and begin life, not where his father left off, but where his father began. He now had a fair opportunity to test the old-fashioned doctrine that Colonel Waters loved so much to preach, that it is better to

be born poor than rich. Pleasant had not been born poor, nor had he exactly *achieved* poverty,—it had been thrust upon him. He was at the bottom of the ladder, standing upon precisely the same round upon which his father had stood before him. Would the son achieve less than the father?

He had the will, and, having the will, he felt quite sure there must be a way out of the difficulty. Would he find it?

Let us follow him, reader, and see.

CHAPTER VIII.

JOSIAH BALDWIN, Esq., Merchant, kept store on "The Corner." By country people his place was sometimes called "old Baldwin's," but the town people never thought of referring to it by any other name than "the corner." To be more specific, Baldwin's store was at the junction of the two principal streets of the village, known as Main and Market Streets. It was the centre of the village, but the centre rather from a business than a geometrical point of view. It was convenient to the post-office, the drug-store, the court-house, the county jail, and the bar-room. It was the busiest corner of the town. There were plenty of corners in the village, but this was emphatically *the* corner.

It was very near Baldwin's corner that the country wagons unloaded, and the farmers drove bargains, and exchanged their produce for all needful supplies, such as sugar, coffee, molasses, leather, hardware, and fertilizers.

As Colonel Waters had, in due course of time, been honored with the noble distinction of F. F. V., so had Baldwin, by reason of his wealth and family

connections, been awarded a like distinction in the society of the village community. The place of his nativity was wrapped in mystery, as he had never thought proper to disclose it, and no one was bold enough to inquire.

Enough was known, however, to preclude all probability of his being a native-born Virginian. He was first introduced to the village people in the capacity of clown in a travelling circus. When the circus left the village, Baldwin, struck with the ease and comfort of the inhabitants and their plain, honest ways of dealing with one another, thought there could be no better place in Virginia in which to cast his fortunes and lay the basis of his operations. And so at Littleton he remained. From his business as clown he advanced to the more honorable vocation of an itinerant merchant, or peddler. In time another step was taken, when he reached the dignity of merchant and dealer. To the business of merchant he added that of buying and selling negroes. From negro-trading he advanced by rapid strides to what is technically known as "paper shaving," a process which he manipulated greatly to his own profit and to the proportionate loss of creditor and debtor alike. By and by he had amassed a goodly fortune, and, having married a lady who was "well connected," his claim to the title F. F. V. was estab-


lished, and the fact that he had ever been a clown or a "nigger-trader" was buried deep down in the grave of oblivion. But now and then the fact, the unpleasant antecedents, would be dug up by some idle, gossiping ghoul of the village, to the intense disgust of the Baldwin family and the intense delight of their less fortunate neighbors.

At the beginning of the war Baldwin's services were not called for; later on he furnished a substitute; and when the conscript act was in force he was lame and halt and blind, from which several complaints he recovered with remarkable rapidity when the collapse of the Confederacy was certain.

Other people had grown poor in consequence of the war. Josiah Baldwin had grown rich. The substance of many a widow and orphan whom he was presumed to protect had gone into his coffers. Stowed away in his safe were great bundles of deeds, bonds, mortgages, and other evidences of debt. It was said that he owned one-half of the property about the village and had a lien on the other half.

Baldwin was a large, portly man. He would probably have turned the scales at two hundred and fifty pounds. His head was enormous, but not out of proportion to his body. It was without hair, except a narrow strip encircling the base from ear to ear. He wore a full beard, closely trimmed. His eye was small

and black, keen and piercing. About it lurked a half-amorous twinkle. His manner was always polite. He greeted you with a smile that lit up his whole countenance, but there were sinister suggestions in that smile. You did not always feel encouraged by it, and sometimes you feared that he was spreading a net to catch you unawares. It was best, therefore, to beware of the smile. He would cheat you under your very nose, and smile at your stupidity in not detecting him. He would coolly take your last dime, and smile at your distress. The misfortunes of other people never annoyed him. His sympathies were never enlisted in behalf of suffering humanity. With him everything resolved itself into the cold, practical question of business. Every transaction of his life was estimated in dollars and cents, to be finally cast up only when the great reckoning came and the great balance was struck. According to his doctrine, if you were a poor man it was because you were a bad financier; if he was a rich man it was because he was a good financier; if by ill chance, you were his debtor, by good fortune he was your creditor; if, when demand for payment was made, compliance would deprive your wife and little ones of the necessities of life, no appeal to him could induce him to relinquish any of his lawful claims. He was under no obligation, moral or legal, to aid, or to sympathize with, you or yours. The demand upon



you was an affair of business, the debt a part of his estate. Therefore, under the law of the land, he was entitled to it whenever he chose to demand it. Where was the wrong in that?

Baldwin's whole object in acquiring wealth was the gratification of a low, contemptible, and selfish greed. It was not the personal ease and comfort that wealth is supposed to bring. It was not from any laudable desire to add to or build up the material interests of his community. Nor yet was it to relieve the wants and suffering of others. To be "better off" than his neighbors; to be able to boast of his supremacy and mastery over them by reason of the power that wealth brings; to trample underfoot, and grind in the dirt, the poor, the needy, the less fortunate. Such were the laudable objects of this worthy man's life. It mattered little to him how much he was hated or loathed or damned by his neighbors, so long as he could glory in the enviable distinction of being the wealthiest, and therefore the most powerful, man of his community.

Colonel Waters's bank account was larger than Baldwin's. He owned more land and slaves and other property than Baldwin. In the matter of wealth, as well as in individual influence, he was superior to Baldwin, and therefore he was most cordially hated by him. To outstrip Colonel Waters in the race for

riches was the one burning desire of Baldwin's life. It mattered not what doubtful means were used in the final accomplishment of his purpose and desires. Let the race be won, fairly or unfairly.

Colonel Waters was loyal to the Southern cause in the highest degree. Baldwin's sympathies and means were enlisted for Josiah Baldwin alone. Both the North and the South might go to the devil if he could profit by it. For a loyal, sympathizing patriot like Colonel Waters the result of the war was just what might have been expected. Upon the altar of his country he had sacrificed a devoted son. Amidst griefs, cares, and perplexities, fast gathering around, he laid down the burden of life ere peace dawned upon his native land. The inevitable result was financial ruin for his family. To Baldwin, on the other hand, the war insured his good fortune. He foresaw the end and prepared for it.

The great crash came, and in one day the whole country was bankrupt. The slaves and the Confederate currency, which constituted the great bulk of the wealth of the country, were swept away by one stroke. It was as if a great wave had come rolling over the land, sweeping away the accumulated wealth of years, nay, centuries, and pouring it into the bottom of the ocean. But Baldwin had neither slaves nor Confederate money. He refused Confederate money in pay-

ment of debts, though scorned and contemned for the refusal. He exchanged his slaves for cotton and tobacco, in spite of taunts and accusations of disloyalty to, and want of sympathy with, the Southern cause. And when the end came, he placed his cotton and tobacco on the market and received fabulous prices for them in gold and silver currency of the United States. He had plenty when the people had nothing. And now those who had once cursed him patted him on the back, commended his shrewdness, and requested a loan. Others, with not a cent left in the world, gazed admiringly at him as he passed and remarked, "Shrewd old chap! What fools we were not to follow his example!"

The Baldwins were at the top and the Waters were at the bottom. "That is about the size of it," chuckled old Baldwin to himself one afternoon, as he sat in his little counting-room in rear of his store "on the corner." There he sat in his comfortable old arm-chair, calmly smoking his pipe, and smiling benignantly upon his visitors as they came and went. Presently he unlocked a small drawer of his desk, and, taking out a package of papers, carefully untied the old leather string around them, and proceeded to lay them out one by one before him.

Each paper was carefully folded and appropriately labelled. Here was Jonathan Megg's bond for five

hundred dollars, specie payment; here was a mortgage deed upon all the real and personal property of Henry Neighbors, Esq., to secure the prompt payment of the aforesaid Neighbors's bond for one thousand dollars; and here were many other bonds and notes and mortgages.

Baldwin's eye fell upon the particular paper he was in search of.

"Yes, yes," said he, with the old smile, "here it is, safe and sound. I'll just look at it again to be sure that my attorney has made no mistake."

He adjusted his glasses upon his great protruding nose, carefully opened the paper, and examined the date, the signature, and the acknowledgment. All was correct. "Whereas," he read, "the party of the first part is justly indebted to the said Josiah Baldwin, party of the second part, in the sum of two thousand five hundred dollars, to be paid in specie, with interest from date, being for sundry goods, wares, merchandise, and moneys, advanced from time to time by Josiah Baldwin, party of the second part, to the party of the first part; and whereas the party of the first part is desirous of securing the prompt payment of the aforesaid sum of money, with interest; *Now therefore this deed witnesseth* that, for and in consideration of the premises, the said party of the first part doth hereby convey unto J. Singleton Leggs, Atty., all interest of

the said party of the first part in and to all the real estate now owned by the said party of the first part, lying and being in the county of —, etc., etc., in trust, etc., to secure to the said Baldwin the debt aforesaid, etc. Witness the following signature and seal, the day and year first above mentioned. (Signed) Nancy Pleasant Waters." [Seal.]

“Josiah Baldwin will not part with that paper very soon,” he muttered to himself. “It may serve more purposes than one. The time will soon come when I can enforce it, and then the last dollar of the property once owned by this proud family will come into the hands of Josiah Baldwin. Won’t it, eh? Shall I enforce it? I can do it. I *may* do it, or I may *not*.” He looked cautiously around to see if, perchance, any one was in hearing distance. “Mrs. Baldwin has been dead near on to twelve months. Mrs. Waters might be persuaded to take her place. If I can’t persuade her, maybe this paper can. The Widow Waters is a likely woman,—a sensible woman, but a very poor and needy woman. She will ask for time, and I will know upon what terms to grant her time. Josiah Baldwin is a little gray, maybe, but he is young enough and good enough for the Widow Waters. Ain’t he? To be sure he is.” And Baldwin arose and glanced at his hard-lined features reflected in the fly-specked mirror that hung on the wall.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN Mrs. Waters's urgent needs compelled her to apply to Josiah Baldwin for a loan, he simply said, "Of course, madam,—of course you must have money and supplies. I understand it all. So many idle negroes—can't get work—heavy expense. I understand, madam. But times are hard, you know,—mighty hard. I can't say that I am able to accommodate you just now, even in so trifling a matter as this. But I'll look around, madam, I'll look around. I think I know some parties with whom I can arrange to raise the money for you. I'll tell them that yours is an urgent case, and that you can give ample security,—ample security, madam. Of course, you understand that before you effect a loan you must give your obligation and something in the way of a lien on your lands. Times are uncertain, and personal property is perishable, you know. And so a lien on your lands would be the proper thing. Of course I know you will meet your obligation promptly, but business is business, Mrs. Waters. You understand that."

In the end, Mr. Baldwin himself furnished the needed supplies and made the loan requested, and

Mrs. Waters mortgaged her real estate to secure the payment of her indebtedness.

At the close of the war the farm was the only source from which Pleasant could hope, for some time at least, to derive means of support for himself and those dependent on him. To the same source he must look for means of paying the interest upon the debt already fastened upon it. He believed that by industry and judicious management the old farm could be made to repay his honest toil. There had been a time when it more than furnished means for the support of the family and dependents.

True, Pleasant had not been bred a farmer, but Colonel Waters, while affording his sons the advantages of a collegiate education, had not wholly neglected to train them in the practical knowledge of agricultural pursuits. When a barefooted lad, Pleasant had often been sent down to Brook Farm to drop corn, and when the corn was up he learned the use of the hoe. At fourteen he boasted that he could bind wheat as fast as the swiftest cradler in the field could lay it upon the ground.

Thus early he had been taught those things which in after-years proved of inestimable value to him. At the time, the boys thought it very hard that a man of their father's ample means and large estate should "make slaves" of them, and require them to do the

work of field-laborers. And others thought as the boys did.

"Colonel Waters is rich as he can be, and he makes them boys of his'n work like dogs," remarked Dick Doolittle. "I'd see him at the devil before I'd do it," said Sam Softhands.

"The idee of that old coon with all his money puttin' them boys down thar to work with a passel of niggers! It's too bad. I'd pull up stakes and leave the country. You bet yer life I would;" muttered old Johnny Fossil.

Even some of the wiser and better class of people, though they did not deem it prudent to make any comment, plainly disapproved of it. But Colonel Waters, who exercised his own judgment in the discipline of his family, simply said, "My sons shall never be allowed to idle away their time lounging around barber-shops and street-corners. Make 'em maul rails first. It's by far a more honorable and useful employment."

And now Pleasant Waters, penniless and almost without resources, realized in its true and fullest sense the grand lesson his father had sought to inculcate in his rebellious mind,—the lesson of self-reliance. And he blessed the memory and revered the wisdom of his old father, who had early instructed him in that plain practical knowledge that now enabled him to take off his coat and work to real advantage.

Brook Farm, or the Quarter Place, as the negroes called it, lay at the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains. In fact, its northern boundary extended far up the mountain-side. This portion of the farm was almost wholly unfit for cultivation. Only here and there a small but fertile clearing was cultivated in rye or tobacco. The remainder of the mountain land was steep, rocky, and almost valueless. Mineral deposits were to be found in places, but in no large quantities. The rest of the farm, lying at the base of the mountains, had once been remarkably fertile, producing large crops of wheat, corn, and tobacco. At Brook Farm, as stated before, most of the slaves had been quartered.

The farm-house, in which lived the overseer, was a plain, unpretentious structure, built almost entirely of material taken from the farm itself. It was a good type of the farm-houses of Piedmont, Virginia. A rock wall, about eighteen inches high, built of large gray stones, closely cemented, served as a foundation. Upon this rested the body of the house, made of logs hewn from the forest near by. The spaces between the logs were pointed with thin stones, placed one against another in diagonal position. The logs were covered with unplanned boards, laid perpendicularly, giving it the appearance of a genuine frame building. The weather-boarding, with the stone-pointing beneath,

rendered the building impervious to the rain and protected it from the piercing wind-storms that prevail in that section of country.

The house was two stories high, and covered with a roof of chestnut shingles. It contained four good rooms, each provided with a great stone fireplace. One large chimney, of massive stone, built in the centre of the house, served to carry off the smoke from the four fireplaces. The room occupied by the overseer and his wife was plainly furnished with a bed and a few split-bottomed chairs. A six-by-ten-inch mirror hung on the wall. One corner was occupied by a spinning-wheel. Upon a rude shelf, just outside the back-door, rested, winter and summer, a large wooden bucket filled with pure spring water. Above and around this, on the sides of the porch, hung strings of red pepper-pods, sheaves of wheat, ears of corn, and other vegetables.

The room adjoining the one described above was reserved for company, and always contained a bed for the guest who might call for a night's lodging. The stranger was never turned away. He was always sure of a good supper, a warm fire, and the best bed the house could afford, all without money and without price. But, whatever comforts and luxuries the guest was accustomed to at home, he must here rise at five in the morning, and, no matter how cold the winter

air, he must perform his ablutions in the family washpan upon the stone steps outside, and wipe his face and hands on the family towel that hung upon the outer wall. If in winter, he ate his breakfast in the kitchen, if in summer, outside, under the trees. He sat down to the simple board upon a long slab bench, similar to those used in the country school-house or at camp-meetings, and ate with a pewter fork from a plate of blue-checkered earthenware.

Lying in the yard of the farm-house were huge bowlders occupying the accidental positions into which they had been thrown by some mighty convulsion of nature. One of these was as large almost as the farm-house beside which it lay. It was covered with lichens and delicate mosses. And here and there were little cavities, which had the appearance of having been scooped out of the rock. The mountaineers said they were "devil's tracks." Hence they were sometimes regarded with much awe and veneration by the more superstitious of the boys and girls who played around the old rock. When filled with rain-water, however, they were used by the more venturesome as so many little lakes in which to sail their miniature boats.

At the foot of the knoll on which the house stood a clear, swiftly-flowing brook dashed along over a rocky bed. Its continuous noise was like that made

by the falling of rain. The stranger who spent the night in the house, hearing the brook beating along upon its course, was almost sure to think that the rain had caught him on his journey. He would be surprised, on looking out next morning for the murky clouds creeping down the mountain-side and sifting among the laurel, to see instead the sun shining brightly upon the hills and to hear the birds singing merrily in the groves.

At the foot of the hill stood the old grist-mill that did the grinding for the "mounting" folk. The constant flow of the water along the race and over the wheel aided greatly in the deception that suggested rain to the ear of the uninitiated. Beyond the mill was the best portion of the farm, the arable land. Here were smooth fields, long stretches of meadow-land, and peach- and apple-orchards. The mountains seemed to lift their awful forms almost from the yard, for the top of the nearest peak was seen only by looking almost straight up. But, in point of fact, there was a considerable space between the farm-house and the point at which the actual ascent of the mountain began. Within this space was a row of some half a dozen cabins where the slaves were quartered.

A never-failing spring at the foot of the hill supplied the family with water. There was neither well nor ice-house on the farm. The milk and butter

were kept in the "spring-house," a rude cabin built over the branch a few feet below the spring. Within the garden-patch was a row of beehives ranged along the fence. Along the walks flourished gooseberry-bushes, hollyhocks of every variety and color, peonies, morning-glories, and other flowers, but the garden could boast of but few vegetables. These were raised, for the most part, in the low grounds and between the corn-rows.

The largest thing about the farm was the barn. It served not only as a storehouse for the products of the field, but as a common shelter for horses and cattle, sheep and hogs. But, large as the barn was, it did not hold all of the farm products. Just beyond the fence stood a row of haystacks, strawricks, and fodder- and top-stacks stuffed with shucks.

Carr Michael was Colonel Waters's trusted overseer. He was born upon an adjoining farm. His faithful spouse, Betty, was the daughter of a neighboring farmer. Soon after his marriage, Michael moved with his bride to Brook Farm, and became its overseer and chief manager. He was a pure specimen of the native mountaineer, and a fair type of his class. Tall and rawboned, with a large, muscular frame, his hair and beard were inclined to be red. His face was unmistakably red. Like Wordsworth's Peter Bell, "long and slouching was his gait;" but, unlike the

aforesaid Peter, he had not a dozen wedded wives, but was the true and faithful husband of one true and faithful wife, who bore him a dozen as healthy children as ever climbed cliffs, robbed melon-patches, or filched from neighboring peach-orchards. In one other respect did he resemble the worthy Peter, for

"A primrose by the river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him,
And it was nothing more."

For him there was no sentiment in the flowers, no "witchery in the soft blue skies," no grandeur in the towering peak. The old mountain that stood guard over his humble home received the homage of hundreds of visitors. Many a weary mile they came to gaze in admiration upon the fair prospect from its rocky summit. But here was a man who had been born at its base, had grown up and married there, and had lived there until the gray hairs besprinkled his head, and yet had never climbed its side, had never mounted to its summit, had never beheld the magnificent prospect of field and wood and stream that charmed the eyes and thrilled the hearts of so many tourists! Why had he never climbed to the top? Simply because he had never felt any desire to. He had looked upon that "mounting" all of his life. To him it had always been a familiar object. If it

ever attracted his attention as a work of nature, it had long since ceased to do so. To him its only advantages were the shade which it afforded in summer, the protection which it offered from the blasts of winter, and the wood-supply which he took from its sides and hollows. Aside from this, he saw in it nothing but "a big mounting, too steep fur him ter climb."


"No, sir," replied Michael to a tourist one day, "I've been a-livin' yer gwine on forty year, an' hev never yit sot foot on top of that thar mounting, an' what's more, I ain't gwine ter climb up thar at this time of life. Not that I can't, fur I ken. But what's the use? I ken see what's down yere in the flat woods heap better than I could from the top of the mounting. It 'ould jes' be wastin' breath fur nothin'. I laid off when I wuz a boy ter climb up thar one of these days jes' ter say I'd been thar, but you see I kep' puttin' it off, an' puttin' it off, an' now I reckon I won't never git up thar as long as I live."

But devoid as Michael was of any poetic feeling for the charm and beauty of nature, he had a good heart and a genuine soul. He was a kind man in his own way, and a clever man at his own business. That business was to cultivate the ground and to make it sufficiently productive to repay the hand that tilled it. Before the war Michael flourished, as did

Brook Farm and its owner. The mill was busy night and day. Michael was in the field with his corps of laborers at break of day. They breakfasted between the plough-handles and returned home by the light of the evening stars.

But during the war Southern farms were taxed to their utmost. The slaves were to be clothed and fed, the master's family were to be furnished with supplies, and the army must have its share. To meet these constant demands the severest cultivation was necessary, but nothing was done, or could be done, in the way of fertilizing, to keep the soil in a proper condition to bear the heavy drain upon it. Hence, after four years of such cultivation, the land was so exhausted that farms which once produced ten, twenty, or thirty bushels of wheat per acre now yielded hardly more than a return for the seed sown.

Brook Farm had not escaped the common fate. It was now a bald, barren piece of property that lay burning in the sun. The farm-house had suffered in proportion. Its porches were half rotten and tumbling to the ground. The shingle roof leaked, and the windows were patched with scraps of dingy paper. The yard fence and, indeed, all the fences on the farm were mere patch-work. The grass in the yard, the shrubbery in the garden, the trees in the orchard, all were as if some great blight had fallen upon them and



sapped them of their very life. The old mill was in ruins. What a change since Pleasant and his father were wont to ride down to the farm and return with such quantities of fruits and grapes and melons !

Poor as was Brook Farm, it was the only source from which Pleasant could hope to obtain steady employment and a livelihood. Colonel Waters had taken charge of the farm when it was poor and unproductive, and with the aid of Michael had brought it to fine condition. The work of the father had passed to the son. The son was to restore the ruin and havoc of war, and he found the faithful old overseer as ready and willing, and as able as ever to aid him in restoring the old place to its former fertility. Was he not better able? His own strong, hearty sons were with him to aid in the work before him. And so Pleasant, with the assistance of Michael and his sons, made the cultivation and improvement of Brook Farm, for the present, at least, the chief aim of his life.

CHAPTER X.

ONE evening after supper Pleasant lit his pipe and, arm in arm with Winnie, started out in the summer twilight. The air was balmy and laden with the fragrance of June roses and honeysuckle. The western sky was tinged by the after-glow of a summer sunset. The evening star shed its mellow, kindly light just above the silver horn of the new moon.

The brother and sister seated themselves on the broken stone step of the ruined mansion, where the ivy was thickest and the Virginia creeper clung closest.

"Do you know, my dear," said Pleasant, "that I have disregarded my friend Bentley's parting injunction?"

"I am quite sure I know nothing of the kind," said Winnie. "You have never told me yet what the parting injunction was."

"You are quite right. My mind has been so much occupied with other more important matters that I had almost forgotten it myself. But for a circumstance that happened to-day I should not have remembered it now."

"It cannot be very important if it is so easily forgotten."

"To me, perhaps, it is of little importance, but I dare say Bentley thinks otherwise. In matters of love, you know, the slightest trifles are often made concerns of the greatest moment."

"Matters of love, brother? Then your friend has intrusted some message of love to you, and you have forgotten to deliver it. Is that it?"

"Yes. My parting promise to Bentley was to call on Helen Baldwin—his mountain pink, as he called her—immediately upon my return home, and assure her of his constant devotion, and his purpose to return as soon as his fortune was made, which would be but a few years, he hoped, and marry her."

"Helen," said Winnie, "is my best and dearest friend. I don't think she ever really seriously considered that she was engaged to Richard Bentley. She was only a child when, to gratify her father, she consented to the engagement. She never loved Richard Bentley."

For some moments Pleasant did not reply. Then, as if suddenly recalling something, he said, "By the way, Winnie, I think I must have met Helen Baldwin in the south lane by the orange-hedge the very day I reached home, but, at the time, I did not recognize her. She was a wild beauty, certainly,

that I met. It must have been she. I am quite sure it must."

"With a pink sun-bonnet?" said Winnie.

"Yes."

"And black hair falling loosely about her shoulders?"

"Yes."

"And her arm full of wild-flowers?"

"Just the very girl!" said Pleasant, quickly.

"That was certainly Helen, returning from one of her wild rambles through the forest. And you didn't recognize her?"

"No."

"Nor she you?"

"I think not. She was a little frightened, at first, at meeting a ragged soldier in that lonely place. She became entangled in the thorns and dropped her bonnet and flowers. She thanked me when I gathered up the flowers and unloosed her skirts from the bushes. But I didn't think for a moment of her being old Josiah Baldwin's daughter. I remember now that you pointed her out to me at church. But, Winnie, I can't understand how Baldwin can be the father of a girl of such rare beauty and refinement as she seems to possess. I am afraid she must have a coarse, wild vein in her nature."

"But surely," said Winnie, "you have not forgotten

her mother, who was so lovely in person, so gentle in her manners, so kind and affectionate in her nature, so opposite in every respect to her husband. There must be much of her mother's pure and noble nature in Helen's composition. And I love her, brother; love her very dearly. Do you think I could love the coarse nature you speak of?"

"No, my dear, you could not; and because you love her, I myself am already prepossessed in her favor."

"But, brother," said Winnie, "I am anxious that you should meet Helen and be your own judge. She was at the cottage almost every day while you were at Brook Farm. Before you return won't you go with me to see her? Say to-morrow evening. I know you will be charmed with your visit."

"I don't know that I care to form any new acquaintances among the ladies just now," said Pleasant. "There are other matters, of more concern to us all, that demand the whole of my time. But, for your sake, Winnie, and to keep my promise to Bentley, I will go with you to the Baldwins to-morrow."

CHAPTER XI.

IN a large yard, opposite the village school, stood the most conspicuous building of Quality Hill. It was built close to the public road. In consequence the front-yard was very narrow, and the back-yard very broad. It was a large frame building, with a loftier, prouder bearing than the neighboring houses. It had higher porches and more of them. It had innumerable little windows and ornamented side-lights. And it could boast the only bow-window in the village.

The eaves were adorned with fantastically carved woodwork, like the trimmings of a fine lady's dress. Depending from the gables were wooden crosses and anchors, like the pendants from a fine lady's ears. The comb of the roof was ornamented with a row of arrow-heads, like the crowning dress of a fine lady's head. The house was painted the deepest and most startling colors. Its prominent position and gaudy appearance were almost sure to attract the attention of the passer-by, while the modest little homes half concealed by the thick foliage were passed unnoticed.

Early every morning Josiah Baldwin, Esq., Merchant, the proud owner of this fine house, might be

seen to issue from the great door, puffing vigorously at his pipe and swinging his large silver-headed cane. He descended a long flight of steps, at the foot of which a horse and buggy were generally in waiting for him. He then drove to his store on the corner, or to the post-office or the bank. Occasionally he went out to his country-place to inspect the crops. Sometimes, and not unfrequently, the village gossips said his horse and buggy were seen standing before the humble cottage of the Widow Waters.

Some said that the widow was largely indebted to the merchant, and naturally he was looking after his interests. Others slyly hinted that the old gentleman had matrimonial intentions, and was paying his respects with a view to a proposal. But as to whether his attentions were directed to the widow or to her daughter the gossips were divided.

The evening following the conversation recorded in the last chapter, Pleasant and Winnie ascended the steps of the Baldwin mansion and rang the door-bell. Immediately confusion reigned in the household. The servant in the kitchen heard the ring and ran excitedly out into the back-yard far enough to catch a glance of the "company" who were waiting a response to the bell. Having satisfied herself that it was a "strange gemmen wid Miss Winnie," she returned to the kitchen and quietly resumed her work. When the sound of the

bell reached the chamber, it caused a flurry of excitement there also. Village people are never ready to receive company, and they are always startled and thrown into confusion by the ringing of the door-bell. Everything must be attended to. The children's faces need washing. The room needs straightening. The rug must be found and put in its proper place before the hearth; the chairs must be arranged; scraps of paper and cloth must be gathered up, and the baby's wrapping stuffed in the corner. Then the mirror must be consulted, and a hasty toilet made, with a brush of the hair, a touch of chalk, a bit of rouge, or a drop of perfume. And all must be done in a moment, lest the company become impatient and ring a second time.

Mr. Baldwin, though fond of outward show, kept no servants about the house in such idle employment as answering the bell-call. This duty, therefore, devolved upon some member of his family, usually his widowed daughter, Mrs. Norton. As for Helen, there was no telling where she was. She might be asleep up-stairs in her room, or she might be in the parlor, absorbed in some favorite novel, or she might be climbing the cherry-tree in the orchard. What was to be done must be done quickly. So Mrs. Norton set to work to make things presentable in the shortest possible time.

Meanwhile, Pleasant, standing upon the elevated

porch, cast a hasty glance at his surroundings. To his mind the house and all about it were a mere vulgar display, in keeping with the vulgar taste of the owner. There was nothing refined in the aspects of the place, but everywhere there was a kind of loudness that disgusted rather than pleased a cultivated taste. There was a charm and virtue about the humble farm-house and its simple surroundings that this grand house could never possess. There was a comfort and a quiet, unostentatious elegance about the modest, old-time, village residence that this fine house, with all its glowing paint, its stained-glass windows, its fancy porches, its arrow-heads, crosses, and anchors, could never command.

Mrs. Norton opened the door. If she had been running a race she could not have been more flushed and agitated.

"Did anybody ever!" she exclaimed. "It's only you, Winnie Waters! What did you mean——?" Here she paused with a half-frightened look when she discovered that Winnie was not alone. She had been on the point of administering a rebuke to Winnie for ringing the bell and rousing the whole house, instead of walking in without ceremony, as had been her custom. But the sudden appearance of a gentleman put a stop to the intended rebuke.

Pleasant, who had been gazing over the railing of

the porch, turned at the sound of Mrs. Norton's voice and came forward with extended hand.

"Don't you know brother?" said Winnie to her friend.

"Why, Mr. Waters!" exclaimed Mrs. Norton, placing her hand in his, "I am so glad to see you, and you are looking so well too! I had no idea it was you. When I opened the door and didn't see anybody but Winnie, I was just fixing to give her a good scolding for ringing the bell. Do come in, Winnie. Just give me your hat, Mr. Pleas. I used to call you 'Pleas,' you know," with a look of exceeding tenderness from her great liquid eyes; "but, law me, that's been so long ago I reckon I'll have to say 'Mr. Pleas' now. I can't say 'Mr. Waters.' That's too cold and distant, you know.—Walk into the parlor.—I won't take you into the chamber,—everything is so turned up—Oh, my! Did anybody ever! I'll just run out and call Helen.—But where she is I declare, for my life, I don't know. I'm afraid she has gone off with papa somewhere.—Just sit down, Winnie, you and Mr. Pleas.—I'll be back in two seconds."

And away dashed the erratic, garrulous Mrs. Norton in quest of the wayward Helen, leaving Pleasant and Winnie seated on the sofa to entertain themselves as best they could until her return. But the two seconds of

time allotted by Mrs. Norton for her return lengthened into many minutes.

Meanwhile, the ex-soldier, so long used to the plain life of the camp and to the humble surroundings of the little cottage he now called his home, was struck with the handsomely-furnished parlor,—for it was handsomely furnished for a village residence. There was no carpet upon the smoothly-polished, brown floor, but the chairs had cushioned seats and were covered with velvet plush. A pair of tall vases, filled with wild-grasses and flowers, adorned the mantel. The rest of the available space upon the mantel was taken up with innumerable trinkets, such as shells and crystal-shaped flints, and mounted photographs of family and friends. But the crowning glory of the mantel was the large mirror, with its broad, gilded frame, that graced the wall above it. A peep into the mirror revealed almost the entire contents of the parlor without the vulgar necessity of facing about to take an inventory. Reflected in its polished surface was a large rosewood piano, standing near the entrance, with sheet and folio music scattered carelessly over its fancy-figured cover. A centre-table stood out prominently with its burden of books,—green-backed and red-backed books; gilt-edged and gold-lettered books,—with its large family album, and its silver card-receivers. On the walls were quite a variety of

highly-colored pictures,—pictures of landscape and of skyscape; pictures with great green rivers and red and yellow forests; with golden sunsets amid the splendors of saffron and purple and crimson skies. Some of the pictures had been bought at auction; some were heirlooms in Mrs. Baldwin's family; others were bright and shining samples of the development of the artistic tastes of members of the Baldwin family.

"Really you must excuse me for staying out so long," said Mrs. Norton, as she bounced into the room. "I was looking for that rascal, Helen. She drove off with papa about an hour ago, and left word that she would come by the cottage, Winnie, and bring you home with her."

"Oh, well," said Pleasant, "when she finds that Winnie and I are here she will come straight on, no doubt."

"It was so nice in you, Winnie, to bring your brother over to see us, and he is just looking splendid!" with a considerable emphasis on the last word, while an arch smile played over her countenance. "Don't you think Mr. Pleas is just looking splendid, Winnie?"

Winnie replied that her brother always looked splendid to her. Pleasant colored slightly at the bold compliment, and acknowledged it with a simple, "Thank you."

Mrs. Norton's graceful form sank into a large cushioned rocking-chair that quite touched the arm of Pleasant's chair. She turned her beautiful eyes full upon him as she proceeded to engage him in conversation.

Waters was a man of courage. He could stand boldly and unflinchingly before the enemy when the fight was hottest. But in the presence of a woman of Mrs. Norton's type he was reticent, easily embarrassed, and, as he himself confessed, an arrant coward.

Before her marriage Mrs. Norton had been the gayest, giddiest girl in the village. A woman of splendid physique, tall, graceful, and of almost queenly carriage. Her figure was full, well developed, and neatly proportioned. Her hair was dark. Her complexion, though not faultless, was generally fair. At a little distance it seemed absolutely without blemish, but a closer inspection revealed a few freckles on her nose and cheek. Her face was full and well rounded, her lips enticing.

But her chief attraction lay in her large brown eyes, which were shadowed by long, dark lashes. There was not so much of tenderness there as a kind of lurking, half-mischievous expression that lured the victim on. A smile always played around her bewitching mouth.

In mere outward form Mrs. Norton was indeed a

beautiful woman, but there her beauty ended. She had attended the schools and "gone through" all the studies, including music and painting, usually taught in the female colleges of the day, and yet she appeared to be ignorant of the first principles of a large percentage of these studies. Certainly, her knowledge, in so far as books were concerned, was most superficial. Then, too, she was sadly lacking in conversational powers. She talked enough, and loud enough, for that matter, but her sentences were disjointed, incoherent utterances, mere spasmodic attempts at conversation.

Such had been Mrs. Norton before her marriage. After two years of married life came her widowhood. It found her little changed. And to-day, as she greeted Pleasant, he could not but say to himself, "The same gay, giddy girl she always was."

Mrs. Norton having informed "Mr. Pleas" how nice it was in him to call, and how splendid he looked, proceeded to entertain him in her usual incoherent style.

"Oh, I'm so glad this horrid old war is over at last! Ain't you, Mr. Pleas? I know you must be."

"I must confess," replied Pleasant, "that I am glad it is over, however much I regret the result."

"But it's been so awfully stupid, you know, since the young men all went off to the army. And now to think it's all over and the soldiers back at home again!

So like old times! I think it's real jolly myself.—Don't you, Mr. Pleas?"

Mr. Pleas hoped it would not be altogether as gloomy now as it had been in the past.

"I'm so tired of this stupid old place, I don't know what to do.—No parties, no balls, no fun of any sort.—I don't want to have any more war talk.—I'm tired out with it.—Mr. Pleas, I shall get real mad with you if you don't come over real often and cheer us up. Do you hear?"

With a bright laugh she threw herself back in her chair, displaying her figure to the best advantage. The chair swayed slowly back and forth, and her head dropped carelessly on one side. Her dark eyes peeped out mischievously from under their long lashes full into the face of Waters. He returned the gaze, and as he did so, he fancied he saw his own image reflected in the clear depth of those liquid orbs. For the moment he was under the spell of an enchantress. The next the spell was broken.

"I think it will be awfully nice to have you come over and see us real often. You know we used to be such good friends. I know you have not forgotten all that. Have you, Mr. Pleas?"

Now, this was an awkward question to put to Pleasant. He had known Mrs. Norton before her marriage simply as Miss Lizzie Baldwin. Since her marriage

and widowhood he had known her but slightly. And while they had never been enemies, he could not recall the time when they had been very fast friends. He managed to reply, however, with no little embarrassment, that he had not forgotten the time when they "were such friends and all that," whatever "all that" meant, and that he would be delighted to call often, but he was afraid the press of urgent business engagements would prevent him from visiting as frequently as he desired.

"Now, Mr. Pleas," she replied, with an arch smile, again turning her gaze upon him, "you don't mean to say that you are going to be one of those stupid business fellows!—Not going to parties and balls, like you used to?—When you and I were such good friends, you know, and all that."

What reply Mr. Pleas made to this last remark is not recorded. Winnie just then began to thump so loudly on the piano that his response was lost. And the rapid flow from Mrs. Norton's inexhaustible stream of words was suddenly checked by the entrance of Helen.

Waters had known Helen Baldwin simply as a child, except for the few chance meetings already mentioned. To-day she stood before him in the full bloom of young womanhood. She was the very picture of health. The flush upon her cheek was like the

delicate tint of the rose-leaf. She was not so tall as Mrs. Norton. Her eyes were large and dark like her sister's, but with infinitely more of tenderness there. Between the two sisters there was a marked difference. Helen was a very child of Nature, as nimble as the squirrel and

"Sportive as the fawn,
That wild with glee across the lawn
Or up the mountains springs."

But with all her untutored nature she possessed the gem of true womanhood. There was a freshness about her that was charming. Her bright spirits bubbled over with life and dispelled gloom. The tones of her voice were cheery; her wild, merry laugh was good for the listener. There was a keen sense of humor, too, in her nature.

A sentence, a word, a gesture, a tone, often brought vividly to mind some familiar scene or character. The common affairs of life, the trivial incident that would hardly be worth noticing, became full of life and meaning when repeated by her.

She cared little for the conventionalities of life. Nature was the "nurse, the guide, the guardian, of her soul and all her moral being." But as Nature has her freaks, so, likewise, had Helen Baldwin. At such times she was generally misunderstood and thought a spoiled child. Though usually sunny in her

disposition, clouds would sometimes obscure the sunshine. She had her hours of sincere grief, and then her tears flowed freely.

She was passionately fond of flowers, but especially wild-flowers. To-day her bonnet was decked with sprigs of pine and sprays of wild honeysuckle. On her bosom was a large bouquet of creamy chrysanthemums. Indeed, meet her when you might, a bunch of snow-balls, or hyacinths, or honeysuckle, or tiger-lilies, or chrysanthemums was always a conspicuous part of her dress.

Helen greeted her friend Winnie with an affectionate kiss, but to Pleasant she gave only her hand. She seemed a trifle embarrassed when Pleasant expressed his pleasure at again meeting her and so many of his old friends and acquaintances after his long absence. He had already recognized in her the same handsome creature whom he extricated from her entanglement in the south lane; the same wild beauty who passed him at such reckless speed in the forest.

Helen replied that of course she was glad to meet Winnie's brother, but she was afraid she wasn't *very* glad he was back again, for she knew she should not see half as much of Winnie as she used to. Then, with a bright, cheery laugh, she passed over to Winnie, and was soon absorbed in the recital of some startling *adventure of the preceding day*.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Norton, delighted to find herself in such close proximity to a gentleman of such "splendid appearance," lost no time in pouring into his ears a perfect stream of words. Pleasant would have beat a retreat, and a most ignominious one, but he was hopelessly barricaded by the handsome widow, lolling languidly in the big arm-chair at his elbow. He could only glance now and then at the pretty Helen, in excited conversation with Winnie. He felt that the purpose of his visit, for that evening at least, must be deferred. At any rate, when he arose to depart, the message he wished to deliver had not been delivered, nor was it delivered upon that evening. And a great many evenings were destined to come and go before the words he wished to speak were ever spoken.

CHAPTER XII.

THE summer of '65 was a dreary time for the people of the South. The struggle was over, but like a great black cloud the smoke still hung above the land. Through the thick gloom the light streamed but faintly. Everything was in that unsettled, chaotic state that marks the downfall of an old system while forecasting the dawn of a new era. The old order of things had passed away; the new order was about to begin. In country, in town, and in village, in the richest and in the humblest home alike, great and sweeping changes had taken place. Civil authority had given place to military. The slave was the equal of his master. The greatest financial schemes, the deepest-laid plans, had come to naught, and all over the land the people were utterly demoralized and weighed down with gloom. The plans of a generation were swept away. The path for the future was dark and difficult.

Many were stripped of the last remnant of their property at an age when to retrieve their ruined fortunes was a physical impossibility. Many a man who, surrounded by the comforts of a prosperous home, would have lived out his allotted threescore

years and ten, now, realizing his penniless condition, and mercilessly pursued by the demon debt, fell crushed by the great weight, and hastened to the tomb, the only sure haven of peace and rest.

Others sat supinely down to drift with the tide, indifferent whither they drifted, content to live upon the recollection of past glory. To this latter class belonged many members of families that boasted of former greatness, of vanished wealth, of a long line of distinguished ancestry,—a class sometimes denominated “broken-down aristocracy.”

Many young men, and, in fact, the majority of the young men of the South, who, at the beginning of the war, were pursuing their studies at the colleges and universities, preparing to follow the paths of their ambition, found the three or four years set aside for that purpose gone forever, leaving the task just where it began. With four years of life gone, it was too late to go back and resume the old work, and so their plans and ambitions, whatever they were, must, in most instances, be abandoned entirely. Even had they the time or the inclination to return to their studies, the means were lacking.

Such was the case with Pleasant Waters. He might have found time to return and complete his collegiate course, but he had not the means, and, besides, he felt that whatever ambition he might have

had, or even now cherished, must, for the present, at least, be sacrificed for the sake of those whose comfort and welfare were dearer to him than the mere gratification of a personal desire. Certain it was that, whatever might happen, he would never forsake his country or his kin so long as either stood in need of his services. Therefore it was his duty to seize the opportunities at hand, and, abandoning every selfish thought, devote himself to the cultivation of the farm, the management of the homestead, and the watchful care of his loving mother and sister.

Upon the farm, he found in Carr Michael an industrious and able assistant. At the homestead, good, honest, old Abe was a man "dat wuz al'us handy." Many a panel of the rickety fence did Abe mend, and he looked "arter de auchid an' de gyarden jes' de same as ef dey wuz his'n an' nobody elses."

Mrs. Waters quickly realized the new order of things, and accepted it without a murmur. Her life hitherto had not been an idle one. Even when surrounded by the comforts of a luxurious home, she was an active, useful worker. She sought out the needy, the sick, and the afflicted. She was known far and wide for her kind ministrations. She was studious of her husband's pleasure and comfort; she lived for her children. She was the mistress of many slaves, and upon her necessarily devolved much work on their

account. Often had she in person tended their sick-beds; often had she gone in the dark, lonely night, through rain, and storm, and cold, to their humble cabins, to sit at their bedside, to minister to their wants, to offer prayer in their behalf.

Few, very few, had been the idle moments of Mrs. Waters's life. And now that the companion of her life was taken from her, her servants freed and scattered, her old home a charred and blackened ruin, she lived, but lived only for her children, made doubly dear by reason of the great misfortunes the late years had brought upon her. For their sakes she was ready to endure any hardship or make any necessary sacrifice.

And so, while her son toiled, Mrs. Waters, day by day, with her own hands set in order the humble home in all its appointments, and made it as cheerful and inviting as a mother's care could make it. In his presence she never complained, never grew weary, was never despondent. About her there always hovered an air of calm serenity, of quiet, undisturbed repose. Under all the trying circumstances of her new position, she appeared the very embodiment of contentment. This self-sacrificing, ever-cheerful disposition of the mother insured, in a great measure, the comfort and happiness of the home.

And then, too, Winnie Waters had inherited, to a considerable degree, the sweet temper and cheerful dis-

position of her mother, together with a goodly share of the shrewdness and business tact of her father. She was neither proud of affluence nor ashamed of poverty. Foolish notions and false pride were no part of her nature. Calmly and sensibly she viewed the state of affairs. She recognized the true condition of her country as well as could have been expected of a girl of her age. She knew that their sudden fall from affluence to poverty was the result of the war, and could not, by any ordinary means, have been averted. She was, therefore, resigned to the decrees of fate.

And yet it must be remembered that Winnie Waters had been, like most Southern girls who were similarly situated, reared in luxury. She had been petted by her father, idolized by her mother, and dearly loved by her brothers. Dutiful servants had been ever ready to attend upon her slightest wish. In a word, she had never known a moment's privation of any comfort she desired, had never dreamed that in her future life she would ever be called on to learn the lesson of self-reliance.

But now a new life confronted her, and one that could not be thrust aside.

Self-restraint, privation, nay, even manual labor in the household duties, self-reliance in its severest sense, all were upon her without warning. How was she to meet the change?

At the moment, in the first hours of trial, she felt

that she could submit to the inevitable without a murmur, nay, more, that she could surrender whatever a smiling fortune had bestowed upon her and take up the daily round of irksome duties willingly, cheerfully, if by so doing she could contribute aught to the happiness of her mother or inspire any hope in the bosom of her brother. Theoretically, the task seemed not so difficult of performance, but the paths, be it remembered, were new and untried for her. Along them difficulties were to be encountered such as her young and inexperienced mind had never dreamed of. They were like the untrodden steeps of her native mountains. In the distance they seemed smooth and easy of ascent, while the sharp crags, the pitfalls, the thorny passes, lay concealed beneath the rich beauty and grandeur of the purple distance.

In the line of domestic duties Winnie was of invaluable assistance to her mother, but, aside from this, she found considerable leisure-time on her hands. In such trying times she felt she must do something to fill up these idle hours, something that would lighten the burden upon the shoulders of her brother. Her knowledge of music enabled her to give instruction to a class which she succeeded in making up by her individual efforts and by an advertisement in the *Weekly Clarion*. It was this advertisement that called forth from old Mrs. Jenkins the remark,—

“What er mighty comin’ down fur them Waters’s! Who would er thought it! They say her mother was er schoolmarm before her, an’ er Yankee schoolmarm at that, but the truth is nobody knows who she is or whar she come from.”

Sometimes remarks of this or a similar character would be repeated in Winnie’s hearing. To her young and sensitive mind they were often annoying, and even mortifying, but, nothing daunted, she kept busily on, and, while others talked, her class increased, until her hours of idleness were as few as those of her mother or brother.

In the active discharge of her duties she scarcely felt fatigue of mind or body. She went about her daily task with a bright, smiling countenance. It was only when the day’s duties were over and the quiet night had come that she would steal out under the silent oaks, with no witness but the evening star, and give way to her sorrow.

At such times, a full realization of the mighty change in her surroundings would take possession of her soul with startling force. The future, stretching forward into long years, was gloomy, and no single star of hope glinted above the horizon.

Pleasant would often go softly out and seat himself on the sod beside her, and gently draw her hand in his. “Be of good cheer,” he would say. “Let us

learn to labor and to wait. The time is coming when we shall emerge from this darkness and gloom into the light of a prosperity that shall increase in brightness as the years roll on."

Then the sweet words of her brother would drive away all trace of grief and sorrow. Her own trials grew light as air. The star of Hope, that seemed forever set, rose again, and the future grew bright like the roseate hue of her own sweet summer sky.

CHAPTER XIII.

PLEASANT's time was mainly occupied at the farm, the mill, and the home-place. He found but little opportunity to attend to social calls, and was obliged to decline many invitations which, but for urgent business, he would have gladly accepted.

However, he never failed to respond to such invitations when they came from "the Baldwins." When, at nightfall, he returned fatigued from his labors, he would draw Winnie's arm in his and propose a stroll, and, somehow, he always managed to pass just in front of the Baldwins' house, where the lamplight streamed full upon his path from the cosey parlor. Sometimes they would pause under the spreading elm to catch the sweet notes that floated out through the half-open window. Often, too, Helen would trip lightly down the path and join them, and Pleasant, with Winnie on one arm and Helen on the other, would loiter slowly along in the moonlight.

At such times Helen was brimful of fun. Her merry laugh rang out upon the summer air as she related the events of the day, where she had been, what she had done, and whom she had seen. Sometimes she

would startle Pleasant by the free, unrestrained manner of her talk. She had no secrets. Whatever she felt or thought was almost sure to find expression in words. Her loves and her hates were generally known to her companions.

Bentley was the only human being about whom Helen seemed unwilling to talk. Several times Pleasant had ventured to allude to the relations existing, or supposed to exist, between her and Bentley, but it seemed to annoy her so much that he was unwilling to pursue the subject further. After all, what could Richard Bentley be to Helen Baldwin? When she knew him she was a mere child. To please her father she had consented to a hasty engagement, but now she could hardly be expected to await the uncertain movements of so erratic a man as Bentley. And while she must still be regarded as the affianced of Bentley, it was probable that she could forget him, or, at least, bestow her love on some other man. Should Bentley return now, it might be that a man of his dashing character, of his wild, romantic life, should easily captivate the simple child of nature.

Such were the thoughts that passed through Pleasant's mind; but what was Helen to him? She was, in the first place, the promised bride of his best friend. Pleasant admired her in some respects, but her wild, untutored nature must be trained and subdued before

he could love her. But why talk of love at all, even if Helen were free from her engagement to Bentley? A man as poor as Pleasant, whose mother and sister depended for their daily support upon his labor, could not think of marriage. Mere sentiment must give place to the severely practical. Once clear of debt he might give some thought to these matters. But suppose (Pleasant was always supposing cases, though he declared that Helen was to him as a very dear sister)—suppose for the sake of argument, as the lawyers say, that he should by any possibility fall in love, and the object of that love should be Helen, would that tyrannical, mercenary old father of hers consent to the union? Never! But, pshaw! Why suppose a thing that could never happen? Why suppose anything, when matters of such prime and practical importance claimed not only his whole time, but all his energies of body and soul?

CHAPTER XIV.

MORE than three years had passed since the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia. The black cloud that hung like a pall over the South had not disappeared, but here and there rifts began to appear, through which the first joyful rays of the light of prosperity struggled faintly. Yes, the clouds were parting slowly, but before long they must roll back and let in the flood of sunshine to brighten and warm back into new life the dead land. The Old Dominion was soon to resume her place in the ranks of the States and be a part of the Union, from which she had been so long separated.

The village of Littleton gave unmistakable signs of new life. Infant industries were springing up. While the land was still poor, very poor, there was a perceptible improvement in the products of the farm. The large crops of tobacco commanded good prices and caused an influx of the much-needed currency into the country.

For Pleasant the struggle during these years had been a hard one. By the most economical management Brook Farm produced barely enough to support the family and pay the interest on the mortgage. Luxuries

they could not afford. Everything but the absolute necessities of life was denied them.

The once prosperous little family were engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle with poverty. Heretofore it had been theirs to command, and they were obeyed. Now, the order of things was reversed. They were no longer masters, but slaves,—slaves to their own necessities. Had they been poor always, their poverty would have been far easier to bear. As it was, the very remembrance of their former wealth and comfort made their present condition the more intolerable. It was the worst kind of poverty: it was poverty with pride; a poverty that must be endured, but endured in silence.

The Waters family felt their condition keenly, for they were a proud people, but their pride was not vain or foolish. Pleasant was too proud to complain, or to sit supinely down and mourn over lost advantages. If the world owed him a living, it was not on account of his former wealth or standing. His was a pride that would never suffer him to remain long under the iron heel of poverty.

And so he struggled on through the years, making some progress, but so slow and imperceptible did it seem that at times he almost lost courage, and ceased to hope that the time would ever come when he should be free from debt and experience once again the pleasing sensation of being independent of the world.

By and by, the light began to shine faintly across the dark path. The future gave promise of better things. The products of the farm, and especially the tobacco crop, upon which Carr Michael prided himself, sold well. As the confidence between the sections was gradually restored, Northern capital began to seek investment in Southern lands. As a consequence, the market value of real estate, especially about the towns and villages, began to increase.

There was every prospect that, by the increase of capital and population, a new life would be infused into the village, and in a few years, at most, vacant building lots would be in demand. If, by any means, Pleasant could hold the village property a short time longer, there was little doubt that the ample grounds about the house might be cut up into valuable building lots, and sold at a price that would enable him to pay off the whole of his indebtedness to Baldwin and still have a comfortable home for the future.

But the very fact that the times were propitious, and pointed to an increase in the value of real estate, caused him great uneasiness. Baldwin was a remarkably shrewd business man. The greater part of his fortune had been made by a strict observance of the values of real estate, buying when the market was low and selling at top figures. If Baldwin's sharp business sense led him to believe that there would be a rapid advance in

real estate, he would proceed at once to enforce all of his mortgages. Thus he would become the purchaser of the property when sold at its lowest prices, and in a few years sell on an advanced market. Indeed, he had already enforced several mortgages, and it was hardly to be hoped that he would allow such an opportunity as the sale and purchase of the Waters property to escape him.

Now Baldwin was a man for whom Pleasant had no great fondness. On the other hand, he rather disliked him. But it was a case of the head in the lion's mouth. It required an exceedingly cautious movement to get well out of danger without being crushed. Hence Pleasant was anxious to remain upon the best of terms with the old man. He treated him with marked deference and respect. It was his nature to treat the humblest, as well as the most influential citizen, with uniform courtesy and consideration. But it was noticeable that he treated Baldwin with more deference than he was accustomed to show in his intercourse with other neighbors. He consulted Baldwin as to all his plans and prospects, giving him to understand that he called upon him at his store so often, and consulted him so frequently, on account of his superior wisdom in all matters pertaining to finance and agriculture. He used dissimulation where he was doubtless scarcely aware of it. Had he been charged with acting

thus, he would have indignantly denied it, and his denial would have been honestly made. And can we blame him that he allowed himself, on account of the interests of his mother and sister, to be drawn unconsciously into a course of action that, at first sight, seems entirely unworthy of him?

But in all his conferences with Baldwin, in all his efforts to gain the old man's favor, Pleasant had never intimated to him that he held, with power to collect, the bond of Josiah Baldwin to Richard Bentley. Why should he? The bond was not his property. He did not feel authorized to collect it until the contingency arose that gave him that power.

Bentley was still alive and had made no call for the collection. Should he demand the money, or should he fail to return it within the time specified at their separation, it would then be soon enough to notify Baldwin that the bond was in his hands for collection.

But there was another great and unforeseen difficulty. Baldwin's determination, if possible, to wed with Mrs. Waters has been already spoken of. He saw in such a union the long-desired opportunity for the alliance of the two most widely-known families in the community. The apparent fondness manifested towards him by her son led Baldwin to believe that he would be a welcome suitor for the hand of Mrs. Waters. And, to the avaricious mind of the old merchant,

nothing appeared so powerful an instrument for the attainment of his object as the debt which he held against the Waters estate. If his offer of marriage should be accepted, the property would be relieved of the debt, if not for all time, certainly so long as Mrs. Waters should live. And aside from these considerations, see what untold advantages she should enjoy as his wife, the mistress of his house, the wealthiest lady in the whole country around. On the whole, Baldwin was rather sure that his suit would be successful.

When a suspicion of Baldwin's intentions first dawned upon the mind of Pleasant, it annoyed him no little. At times, indeed, he would dismiss the very thought of such a contingency as without foundation in fact.

"After all," thought he, "the suspicion is groundless. No such intention has ever entered Mr. Baldwin's mind. What more natural than that he should visit the cottage frequently? Do not I pay frequent visits to his house and his office? Do I not call upon him, talk with him, consult him in all matters of business? Am I not the friend and confidant of his daughter Helen? Is not Winnie, too, upon the most intimate terms with the family? Away with all such foolish suspicions! They are unworthy of serious consideration."

But at other times his views would undergo a

change, and his suspicions renewed themselves with even greater force. At last there could be no doubt about it. Baldwin was seriously paying his addresses to Mrs. Waters.

Pleasant was tortured by the thought. He felt that he could not bear it. Never for a moment did he believe that his mother, left to the guidance of her own free will, would consent to a union so repugnant to her whole nature. But would she consult her own happiness in the matter? She idolized her children. Would this union secure for them the small patrimony still left them? Would it not, in fact, add threefold value to their property, and restore them in time to their former position? Would not her refusal to wed this man deprive her children of the last remnant of their property, and blast forever all their hopes of independence?

Suppose such thoughts as these should take hold on his mother and induce her to sacrifice herself to the real or fancied good of her children? Suppose, as she might, she should marry this man? This new complication came upon Pleasant with a force that almost maddened him. He could not bear the thought of this coarse, uncouth old man wedding his mother. But what if he interposed to prevent it? Baldwin would have his revenge, and that speedily. The loss of property was to Pleasant a minor consideration, but

the sale of the dear old home under the auctioneer's hammer would kill his mother. And then, too, what of Helen? Must he give her up? This would be the inevitable result. And what was Helen to him? She was his friend, and the affianced of a dear friend. Was that all? No; upon reflection, he knew that Helen was more to him than a mere friend. Alas! she had become very dear to him. He did not fear that any chance circumstance should exclude him from her presence, but he knew that, should Baldwin be thwarted in his purpose, his hatred, which must be incurred, would be as bitter and implacable as lasting.

Here was indeed a complicated state of affairs. The debt due Baldwin hung like a nightmare over the family. It must be liquidated, and that speedily. They must be prepared for great sacrifices in face of the exigencies of the case. If the debt could not be paid without sacrificing the property, an immediate effort must be made to raise the money, so that a transfer of the debt to other hands might at least be effected. This done, they would be out of the power of Baldwin, and might defiantly bid him do his worst. Something must be done at once, and Pleasant felt the necessity of advising with some friend. Heretofore Baldwin had been his adviser in all such matters. Now Baldwin was out of the question. He would disclose the whole state of affairs to his honest old

overseer, whose sympathy and aid he could depend on.

"Mr. Michael," said Pleasant, as he was leaving the farm one evening, "to-morrow is court day. Of course you will come up to town? It may be that I shall need you in a matter of business. I can't say just now, but I think I shall. At any rate, don't fail to come to court."

"I've been livin' here fur forty year, come next September," said Mr. Michael, "an' if I miss court this time it will be the first court I've missed in them forty year. An' bein's how you wants me ter come particular this time, I'm sho' not to miss it. You can count on my bein' thar, Mr. Waters."

CHAPTER XV.

It was a dark and gloomy evening on which the conversation between Pleasant and Carr Michael took place as recorded in our last chapter. It was an evening well calculated to fill Pleasant's mind with despondency, weary as he was, and toil-worn and perplexed by doubts and fears. All the morning heavy clouds hung about the mountains, sweeping through the gorges, creeping down into the tree-tops, and sifting among the laurels. The wind blew in spiteful gusts from the northeast. Towards nightfall the rain came slowly down, a drizzling rain, or, rather, a heavy mist. The drops gathered upon the ivy and laurel and trickled down in beady streams upon the grass and ferns beneath. The whole face of the earth seemed saturated by the dampness. That night the wind murmured fitfully around the eaves of the house, rattling the windows and whistling through keyholes, while the raindrops beat an accompaniment upon the window-panes.

Pleasant lay awake until a very late hour. His restless mind was seeking some way out of the difficulties that surrounded him. When he fell asleep, the

night was far spent. The rain had ceased and the wind had lulled.

He was awakened by a shaft of golden sunshine shooting through a rift in the foliage and lighting up his humble room. He dressed and walked out into the yard. The air was fresh, and laden with the delicious odor of the forest. Pendent raindrops scintillated in the sunlight. It seemed as if all the birds of the wood had congregated in the yard and were trying to outvie one another in the display of their vocal powers. The whole face of nature wore a joyous smile.

Pleasant was not insensible to the effect of this simple atmospheric change. The sombre clouds that floated above him on yesterday, and the dismal winds that moaned around the house in the night, had vanished, and with them had vanished his cares. And so it is with us all. To-day, nature looks unkind, feels unkind. All night our minds dwell morbidly upon the petty annoyances of our daily life, the debts we owe, the anticipated failure of cherished schemes, a hundred imaginary difficulties that seem ready to beset us and thwart us at every turn. But morning comes with its sunshine, and wakes the warbler of the woods, and the cares, and petty annoyances, and imaginary difficulties vanish with the night-winds, and the storm, and the clouds.

The little village was alive and wide awake that

morning. The clinking of the carpenter's hammer was heard as he worked busily on some new house, and the hod-carrier sang gayly as he climbed the ladder with his fresh load of mortar for the man on the scaffold. An engine with its train swept around the curve, over Long Bridge, and came screaming into the depot. The clarion note of the crowing cock echoed and re-echoed from lot to lot. The merchant was sweeping the pavement in front of his store, and arranging his wares to attract customers. The market-man rumbled along in his noisy cart.

There was a greater bustle than usual about the village that morning. People moved about in a hurried, half-excited way, and strange visitors struggled in by times. It was the County Court day.

Except an occasional "show," nothing attracted so large a crowd to Littleton as the County Court. At the crack of day, the farmer, mounted on his work-horse, which he had taken from the plough for the purpose, jogged along the dirt road to the village. His clothing was generally a coarse homespun suit, and a dilapidated slouch hat covered his unkempt head. His beard, of several days' growth, resembled the chestnut-burr that grew upon his native hills. His boots, of coarse, heavy leather, with thick soles, were usually well colored by the red clay of the road-bed or the hill-side. They were seldom or never blacked. Indeed,

the average farmer thought it beneath the dignity of a gentleman to wear polished boots. Such effeminacy might suit the dry-goods clerk, the dancing-master, the school-teacher, or even the itinerant parson, but your true yeoman would as soon be caught with a clean linen-bosomed shirt as with a pair of well-polished boots. As one of these knights of the soil was heard to express himself, in language more forcible than elegant, "Them blamed lawyers an' dry-goods clerks kin black the'r shoes an' slick the'r darned stringy ha'r as much as they please, but I'm er gentleman, *I* am, an' I ain't got no time fur no sech foolishness, an' I don't want ter hev nothin' ter do with any man that hes."

His jaws were stuffed with a large "chaw" of "ter-backer," upon which he "chawed" incessantly, stopping occasionally to eject from his mouth the accumulated juice, which at other times trickled in intermittent streams over his chin, and found a lodgment upon his plain, cotton shirt-front, or was wiped away with the open palm of his horny hand.

As he ambled along "the main plain road," he was joined by others of his class, who emerged from the innumerable by-paths and cross-roads that intersected the country. All the roads that led to the county-seat, even from the remotest parts of the county, were lined with people "goin' ter court." By twos and threes, in

groups of half a dozen or more, mounted on young colts and superannuated horses, on asses and the foals of asses, sometimes on oxen saddled and blind-bridled for the occasion, they flocked towards the seat of the County Court.

As they rode along, their arms flapped up and down, or swayed back and forth, as if keeping motion with the shambling gait of their clumsy steeds. The long, knotty switches, suspended in the air, seemed ever ready to descend upon the luckless beasts, but they were rarely used in this service, answering more the purpose of balancing-poles to steady the riders, who urged forward their steeds by incessant nudgings in the animals' flanks with their heavy cowhide boots.

Their talk was generally of the weather and the "craps," and occasionally dropping into politics. The latter was especially the case if some "big gun" was set to "go off" at court.

But few of the great numbers who attended court did so from any real necessity. Some, it is true, went because they had business there, some went because they had no business anywhere else, but all went in deference to a long-established custom. Their grandfathers and their great-grandfathers had always made it a point to attend court, whether they had any business there or not. No matter how cold or how hot, no matter how urgent the needs of the crops, or how

pressing the demands of business elsewhere, in rain, in snow, or in storm, everything must be disregarded and set at naught, and to court everybody must go.

It was a grand gathering of kindred spirits from the whole county. It was an opportunity to meet and talk, and drink one another's health in a cup of good liquor; to abuse politicians, and tax-gatherers, and hard times over their apple-jack. The prohibition and local-option fever had not yet extended to Virginia, and no sumptuary legislation, such as that enacted by our wise and far-seeing Solons in later years, forbade a citizen to exercise his free will in drinking when he pleased, where he pleased, or what he pleased.

By eleven o'clock the village was alive with a swarming mass of humanity. The court green was filled, and the streets and sidewalks were packed and jammed until both were wellnigh impassable. Having no particular business to transact, many stood on the sidewalks, or rode aimlessly up and down in the middle of the streets, exchanging salutations with friends and acquaintances; others congregated around the patent-medicine man and the itinerant vender of the great South American, grease-removing, corn-and-wart-destroying, dirt-annihilating, anthropophagous, shaving and toilet soap, which, for the purpose of advertising and introducing his discovery, and for the benefit of suffering humanity, the large-hearted

and benevolent merchant had decided, for this once only, to sacrifice at the nominal price of twenty-five cents per cake.

But the greatest attraction for the assembled rustics was "the Captain." The Captain, which was the only name by which he was known, was an important factor in all court proceedings, at least in that part of the proceedings which was enacted upon the streets or the court green. No court-day could be complete without him, and on such occasions he attracted more attention than the little judge himself. He combined in his composition the wit, the drunkard, and the auctioneer, and it may be truthfully recorded that in each of these several respects he was a shining light and example. The village boasted that he was at once the greatest wit, the greatest drunkard, and the greatest auctioneer known in all the country around.

When a mere boy he had been apprenticed to an elder of the Presbyterian Church. The worthy elder sought in vain to inculcate in the lad's mind the rigid doctrines of the most rigid school of blue-stocking Presbyterians. It was predestined that the youth should wantonly reject every stern precept and disregard every good example. From early Monday morning to late Saturday night he was behind the counter dealing out meat, mackerel, molasses, cotton cloth, *et cætera*. On Sunday, the great day of rest and recreation, he was

permitted to amuse himself with the Decalogue, the Psalms, or the Sermon on the Mount.

Soon the daily task behind the counter became irksome and the Sunday recreation a bore. The dingy store was a dungeon, the Bible the most hateful of books. His young spirit yearned for the open air and sunshine, and the music of birds and books. He longed for the amusement and companionship of the marble-ring, the fishing-pond, and the cock-fight. Just as the pious elder was congratulating himself that he had "nipped in the bud" the vices of this young scapegrace, and that the moral seed sown by his hand had taken root to blossom, in time, into an abundant harvest of good works, the aforesaid scapegrace unexpectedly shocked his preceptor by declaring his intention, one morning, to "quit him and his d—d old store forever." Before the elder could recover sufficient breath to remonstrate against this wicked and outrageous conduct the lad had taken his departure, and from that day and hour was a free man. He might have been forced to return by law, but no such effort was made. He began to frequent the cock-fight and the horse-race, which led to the saloon and the gambling-house. He took to drink as naturally as the sow to her wallow. After wandering from town to town, taking his degree in street-fighting, experiencing the luxury of a jail, breaking a faro-bank,

and trading in "niggers," he returned "dead broke" to his native village, a wiser, but not a sadder, man, and there settled down as the village wit, drunkard, and auctioneer for all time.

He was known to every man, woman, and child in the community, and was always addressed as "the Captain," in contradistinction, no doubt, to the innumerable host of army captains who still persisted in retaining this title before their names. His real name was seldom mentioned,—so seldom, in fact, that it had an unfamiliar sound to his own ears.

He was a stout, compactly-built man, something above medium size. His complexion was florid; his hair, which had long ago turned gray, was, by the barber's art, kept a raven-black. Depending from his chin was a long, slender beard, which was always in motion, for the lip that wagged it was seldom allowed to remain inactive. Except when the liquor was pouring in, there flowed from those ruddy lips an unceasing stream of marvellous narrations, interspersed with huge oaths and flashes of coarse wit, that set the gaping crowd wild with laughter. He was "on the street" at all hours.

In the early morning, almost before the dawn of day, the Captain was abroad. His lusty voice echoed along the deserted streets, and his loud knock at the saloon door aroused the slumbering citizens. Later in

the day he came out dressed in a neat suit of black, with a broad expanse of shirt-bosom, white as virgin snow. He wore no neck-cloth. His broad collar, a part of the shirt, was fastened with a large gold button. A bright flower of some sort adorned the lapel of his coat, and a large white handkerchief hung from his pocket. Towards mid-day a general loosening would take place. The collar was unfastened and the coat laid aside. The broad white cuffs were loosened at the wrist and the sleeves rolled back to the elbow, displaying a red arm of immense size and power. "Look at that arm!" the Captain would say. "That arm, sir, has been the downfall of many a d—d rascal."

Late in the afternoon, or, in the village vernacular, "towards the shank of the evening," a boy might be seen holding the reins of a horse in front of the saloon. The horse was as well known to the citizens as was the Captain. No one asked any questions. Every one was satisfied that the Captain was within. Any possible doubt as to this fact was soon dispelled by the appearance at the saloon door of the Captain himself, very red in the face, very jovial, and very drunk. He quickly made known his presence in a loud tone, seeming to labor under a conviction that the whole neighborhood was dead or asleep and needed rousing. His remarks, whatever they were, were addressed to

the general public, with an occasional sally at some unsuspecting passer-by.

Seated loosely in the saddle, he surveyed his surroundings with the air of a man who has a contempt for all small things, and a special contempt for so small a thing as a municipal corporation. Down the middle of the street he rode very leisurely, "the observed of all observers," reining up his horse here and there to fire a coarse jest at the head of some unoffending pillar of the church, or to exchange a salutation with the mayor of the municipality.

But with all his roughness of speech and manner, the Captain was a kind-hearted man, and at times showed all the tenderness of a woman. Mingled with the coarser fibres of his nature were others of a much higher and nobler quality. Though in speech he damned all creation, he was ready to give his last cent to relieve poverty or distress. At the approach of chaste womanhood, the coarse jest died on his lips, the half-muttered oath was never heard, and the bold swagger gave way to an awkward, though well-meant, courtesy.

Then, too, there was something akin to poetry in his composition. Sometimes, when he looked upon some beautiful scene of shade and sunshine, of green trees and mountains flooded with the golden light of spring-time, he would pause as if lost in deep and solemn meditation, and from those lips, whence but

lately had issued bitter curses and vulgar ribaldry, came sentiments worthy of a nobler and purer heart. He was touched by the very beauty, and tenderness, and purity of God's world, when he contrasted it with his own brutal and hardened nature. And then, as if ashamed of his weakness, he would hastily wipe away the unbidden tear that had stolen down his rugged cheek. A moment later the old bitter feeling returned, and the man was again under the influence of the arch-enemy.

When Pleasant reached the principal street of the village, he could with difficulty make his way through the surging crowd that blocked the road. Upon the great rock in front of the court-house the Captain was holding a perfect levee. His voice was heard above the deafening din as he shouted, "Going, going, gone! Once—twice—fa'r warnin' to everybody—once—twice—three! All done! Who's the lucky man?"

Across the street, the town idiot, mounted on a farm-wagon, declaimed with great spirit a stump-speech in imitation of the political demagogues of the day.

Pleasant pushed on, threading his way in and out, and finally reached the corner with no other mishap than the knocking off of his hat and the bumping of his head by some clumsy rustic. He was about to enter the "Office of J. Singleton Leggs, Esq., Attorney at Law for this and adjoining Counties," to quote

from the sign of the aforesaid Leggs, when his attention was arrested by the loud and angry tones of a man in the crowd near by.

"It's a d—d lie!" shouted a red-faced, swarthy son of the soil.

The next moment the horny fist of Carr Michael struck the speaker full in the face, and the blood flowed freely. The man staggered and fell back under the heavy blow from the powerful arm.

Immediately the excitement became intense. "A fight! A fight!" The news ran like an electric thrill through the crowd. A street-fight was the chief charm of court-day. The man who missed that important part of the performance went home feeling that his trip to court had somehow been a failure, and having serious doubts whether, after all, life is worth living. Consequently, when it became known that a fight was actually going on, the utmost confusion prevailed, and the whole crowd rushed in a mass to the scene of action, each man striving eagerly to be the first on the ground, that he might not miss a single feature of the performance.

But, on this occasion, the crowd that pressed excitedly to the field of conflict was disappointed. The fight ended as suddenly as it began. The friends of the wounded man conducted him to a safe distance from danger, while the officer of the law gathered up

poor Carr Michael and dragged him towards the "lock-up," and, but for the timely interference of Pleasant Waters, the valiant overseer would have been "in yonder jail incarcerated." However, in consideration of Mr. Michael's well-known reputation as a peaceful and orderly citizen, and upon Pleasant's assurance that no further attempt should be made at the destruction of the individual whose anatomy had been so seriously injured in the encounter, the doughty pugilist was released from the grip of the law and permitted to go about his business.

"That darned rascal," exclaimed Mr. Michael, brandishing his huge fist at some imaginary foe in the air, "called me a d—d liar, sir, an' for why? He wuz a-tryin' ter swap a broken-down, fifteen-year-old mar' fur neighbor Hix's five-year-old sorrel nag. An' when I steps up an' tells neighbor Hix, right ter the rascal's face, that the mar' wuz fifteen year old, an' narry day under, that feller up an' calls me a d—d lie. Now, I've heerd it said that, 'cordin' ter the law of the lan', the d—d lie is the first lick. If it 'taint the law of the lan', it's my law, an' the man that calls Carr Michael a d—d lie might jes' as well make up his miu' that he's got Carr Michael ter whip, or Carr Michael's gwine ter thrash him, one or the other."

When the overseer was sufficiently calm to attend to business, Pleasant said to him,—

"Mr. Michael, you know more than I do about the producing qualities of Brook Farm. I want you to go to Mr. Leggs's office with me, and tell him what you know about it, so that he can get us a purchaser."

"What! you ain't gwine ter sell Brook Farm?"

"I am afraid I shall have to part with the farm so that we can keep the little property we have left in town. I regret the necessity that forces me to this, since we will be obliged to part company, Mr. Michael. But you know Mr. Baldwin has a mortgage upon all of our property. The time has come when this debt must be paid."

Carr paused a moment, as if debating in his mind whether or not he should accompany Pleasant to the attorney's office.

"Is old man Baldwin boun' ter have his money whether or no? Is he a-needin' of it right now?"

"I can't say that he is bound to have it, or is in need of it, but you know Mr. Baldwin is a very exacting man and always demands the last cent that is owing him. I expect to be called on at any time to pay the money. If I shall not be able to pay it, the mortgage will be foreclosed, and the property will be sold at public auction. A forced sale, in these times, means an enormous sacrifice. That's why I am so anxious to effect a private sale."

"Exactly right about that, Mr. Waters. Times is

mighty hard, an' money is sca'ce. It won't fetch nigh its value at auction." Again Carr paused and scratched his head reflectively, kicking at the ground with his heavy boot.

"How much is ole man Baldwin's debt ag'inst the farm?"

"Twenty-five hundred dollars. It wouldn't have been anything before the war, but it seems an immense sum to raise now. I can't see how it's to be done. But here is Mr. Leggs's office. We will talk to him about it."

"Hol' on! Hol' on jes' a minute, an' let's have a talk about this yere lan' business. How much did you say that debt wuz?"

"Twenty-five hundred dollars."

"An' you say he's a-pressin' you fur the money?"

"He hasn't made any demand for the money, but I expect it almost any day."

"Look yere," said Carr, raising his heavy stick and pounding the ground with great vehemence, "I can't stand that, sir. I wuz born an' bred in a mile of that farm. I've tended it now gwine on twenty year, an' I've raised some of the finest craps on it that a man wants ter look at, sir. An' now that ole rascal, Josiah Baldwin, has got his eyes on it; but he sha'n't have it if Carr Michael ken help it. I ain't got much money, but I've made a little from my sheer of the terbacker

craps, an' I ain't spent it nuther. I giv' it ter the ole 'oman an' tole her ter lay it by fur a rainy day. Them wuz mighty fine craps, an' they fetch good prices. You jes' wait an' we'll put our piles tergether an' see if we can't make ole man Baldwin's claws let go of that farm. Let the darned lawyer alone fur ter-day."

"No," said Pleasant, "we are here now. It can do no harm to make the effort. We will go in and talk to Mr. Leggs."

Just then a voice from the steps of the court-house announced that "The Honorable John Rudolph Silver-tongue, of Hill City, will now address the people of — County upon the vital issues of the day. Everybody come and hear this distinguished orator and politician!"

Next to a street-fight, noting so excited the people as a political speech, or a joint discussion, in which the speaker was expected to perform the feat of swallowing his opponent whole, or "chawin'" him to pieces, or skinning him alive. Consequently, when the thunder-tones from the court-house steps were heard, a general rush was made for the court-room, and in five minutes the streets were almost deserted. A few half-drunken stragglers, a lonesome soap-vender, and the town idiot were all that were left of this noisy, bustling crowd.

Pleasant and the overseer entered the office. The attorney was gone, leaving his desk covered with a

scattered mass of writing materials. On the mantel, where it was held by mucilage, was half a sheet of foolscap paper, upon which was inscribed in large, red letters, "Will return after the speaking."

Pleasant looked at his watch: "The speaking will not be over before five. I can't wait. Mr. Michael, we will defer this matter a day or two. I shall see you again before deciding finally what is to be done."

The two men separated. Carr Michael joined the crowd in the court-house. Pleasant returned home.

CHAPTER XVI.

"BROTHER," said Winnie, when Pleasant returned home that afternoon, "here is an invitation to a party. I have waited for you to come back before accepting it."

"A party! Where, my dear?"

"At the Claxtons,—next Thursday evening. Of course we shall go, brother?"

"At the Claxtons,—Thursday evening. Shall we accept the invitation?" The invitation was accepted.

And who were the Claxtons? First there was Mrs. Matilda Claxton; then Mr. Robert Claxton, her husband; and two children, Miss Carrie Claxton and Master Robert Claxton, Jr. These were the individuals that composed the family of Claxtons.

Mrs. Claxton's husband was a well-to-do merchant, who had by industrious and frugal habits accumulated some property.

At the opening of the war, though by no means a young man, he was too patriotic not to respond to his country's call. He shouldered his musket in '61, and stacked it on the plains of Appomattox in '65, passing through the successive grades of private, corporal, ser-

geant, and captain. At the close of the war, he returned to his native village and turned his whole attention to his business, which had suffered considerably during the four years of his absence. Some ten years before the war he had married Miss Matilda Pringle, a dark-complexioned, angular lady of uncertain years. She was one of four daughters of a plain but honest merchant, who had also accumulated a neat little estate. At her father's death, about a year after the close of the war, she inherited a child's portion of the estate. This money, supplemented by an equal sum from her husband's estate, was used in purchasing a "desirable lot" on Quality Hill, and in erecting there a dwelling suited to their means and condition in life.

Mrs. Claxton's husband, had he chosen, could have boasted an ancestry of which he might well have been proud. But it is doubtful whether he ever thought about the matter at all, and, if he did, he was content to know the fact, and too modest to boast of it. True, it was said he did, on one occasion, hint to a certain old lady in the community that his great-uncle had been the founder of a college somewhere, which college had perpetuated his memory in marble, but the next moment the blood rushed to his cheeks, and his ears tingled and burned, as if he were conscious of having committed a grave indiscretion. Never

afterwards was he known to make the slightest allusion, in public or in private, to his claims to a noble ancestry.

With Mrs. Claxton the case was quite different. The family-tree was her one great hobby, which, if she did not straddle, she earnestly strove to climb. This tree, upon her side of the house at least, had its root in her own fertile imagination, where it grew and flourished like the green bay tree of Holy Writ.

Mrs. Claxton felt that there was something in her that warranted the assumption that she had an ancestry lurking somewhere in the dim and misty past which, when discovered and brought to light, would completely eclipse that of her humble neighbors. This idea took firm hold of her mind, and her fertile brain soon searched out and discovered in that convenient past just such an ancestry as would naturally have produced so fine a specimen of gentility as was developed in her dark and angular self. There was no difficulty in fixing a starting-point. The trouble lay in tracing, link by link, an unbroken chain connecting the living present with the dead past. To her own mind the process was an easy one. Her fertile imagination supplied each missing link. But her neighbors were not so gifted in this respect, and would sometimes ask awkward questions or make unpleasant remarks.

“Who is Matilda Claxton, I’d like to know, to be

putting on airs like she was better than her neighbors?" spitefully inquired old Mrs. Jollipp.

"Matilda Claxton putting on airs! The idea!" said Mrs. Temple. "She was nobody but Matilda Pringle, daughter of old Sam Pringle, that used to keep store on the corner. Everybody in town knows who he was, and all about him. I don't mean to say that Sam Pringle wasn't honest. Of course he was honest, but he was no better than his neighbors. That's what I say, and there's no use of Matilda Claxton turning up her ugly nose and forever talking about her kinfolks. It's ridiculous! It's disgusting!"

Now one of those obliging friends, of whom poor Goldsmith tells us, was sure to relate to Mrs. Claxton these spiteful remarks of her neighbors. All this was very annoying to the good lady, not to say mortifying. Her wits were constantly employed searching out evidence to prove to these idle gossips the genuineness of her claims to her boasted gentility. She consulted the oldest inhabitant; she questioned the old women; she even gave audience to the fortune-teller. These people, encouraged by flattery, or induced by the hope of reward, were ever ready to pour into Mrs. Claxton's ear such detailed accounts as were sure to please if not to convince her that her pet theories were well grounded. And so, in time, the tree, that first took root in her imagination, grew and flourished there, until it became

a part of her honest conviction,—a veritable tree, well rounded, and beautiful in all its proportions.

When the handsome residence on Quality Hill—a dwelling in dimensions large, in style pretentious—was completed, the Claxton family moved in. Now, Mrs. Claxton had contributed the whole of her patrimony towards the building of this house, and though this had not amounted to more than half the actual expenditure, she nevertheless persisted in regarding the property as hers absolutely, free from the debts, contracts, liabilities, and especially the control of her husband. She did not consider it necessary to consult his wishes as to its management, or as to any entertainment she felt disposed to give. True, she went through the form of asking his advice as to the propriety of this scheme or that, but she always proceeded to execute it, regardless of his opinion.

One morning, at the breakfast-table, Mrs. Claxton remarked,—

“Robert, my dear, you know it has been more than three months since we moved into the new house” (she could never bring herself to say *our* new house). “I think we might give a little entertainment. Don’t you? The children would enjoy it so much.”

Mrs. Claxton’s husband knew from oft-repeated experiments that her will in such matters was law. He had learned that when she said, “I think we ought

to do this," or "We might have that," following it up with the direct question, "Don't you?" she simply meant "I shall do this," or "I shall have that, and don't you dare oppose me."

So when Mrs. Claxton, on this occasion, suggested an entertainment, and, at the same time, called upon her husband to sanction it, he replied very meekly, "Well, yes—just as you wish about it. In fact—yes, certainly—by all means. When shall it be, wife?"

"Suppose we say next Thursday evening. You know that is our dear Carrie's birthday. She will be sixteen on Thursday."

"Humph! Don't like turning-out parties. Looks too much like advertising to the world that your daughter is on the matrimonial market, ready for sealed proposals."

"Oh, dear; how very silly you talk! A girl with Carrie's advantages and attractiveness need never fear a lack of offers, and good ones too. I let you know, sir, my daughter don't need to be advertised. But, gracious me! who in this little town do you suppose I'd let my daughter marry?"

"Don't know, I'm sure."

"Well, I know. *Not one!* It's perfect nonsense to talk about Carrie's bidding for offers here. If people are silly enough to think such a thing, then I say let them think it! You hear me, don't you?" And Mrs.

Claxton arose and courtesied to her husband with an attitude that would have done credit to a trained actress. In fact, she had evinced considerable talent in amateur theatricals, and at one time thought seriously of going on the stage. "But," she continued, with firmness and composure, "I think Thursday evening the proper time for the party, and I think *you* will agree with me."

"Why, yes—certainly—Thursday, then, if you wish."

Mr. Claxton arose from the table, took up his hat, tiptoed down the hall and out into the porch. He had important business in town that morning.

When the door closed behind her husband, Mrs. Claxton was left alone to arrange the preliminaries of "the great social event of the season." The first duty that presented itself was a very important as well as a very perplexing one.

Whom was she to invite? There were enough people to invite, but whom not to invite without offending was a task that required the utmost tact. In a village, everybody knows everybody, but it cannot be expected that one shall invite everybody to one's party. That all cannot be invited is very clear, even of those entitled to the same social recognition. Somebody must needs be offended, but woe to him from whom the offence cometh, for a lifetime cannot atone for it.

Mrs. Claxton was now the proud owner of a new and handsome house—"a palatial residence," to quote from the *Littleton Weekly Clarion*—situated in the most fashionable portion of the town. She was the wife of a thrifty merchant, the mother of a marriageable daughter and a son with a possible future, and, last but not least, she was the ornament that dangled at the end of a long chain of distinguished ancestors. The trouble, therefore, with Mrs. Claxton was not whom to invite, but whom not to invite. In this important preliminary she dared not consult her husband. He was too democratic in his views, and would be sure to commit some unpardonable blunder. In this she must be the sole judge. No invitation should be given unless signed and countersigned by her.

Having settled this point in her mind, Mrs. Claxton trimmed her pencil, and proceeded to that most difficult task of making out the "list."

"The Baldwins shall head the list. They can boast of no ancestry, it is true. But Mr. Baldwin has a large bank account and is the largest property-owner in the town. As for that story about his having been a clown in a circus or an itinerant pedler, I believe it's nothing but a vile, malicious slander. Envious people will say anything. Why, they even dare circulate base reports about me and my kin! Yes, the Baldwins must be invited by all means. Who comes next?

Judge and Mrs. Davies—of course—very dear friends—most excellent people. And Emily—yes. Next, Mr. John Temple and Miss Cecelia Temple.” (Their father had once represented the county in the legislature.) “Mr. Pleasant Waters and sister. What shall I do with them, I wonder? Colonel Waters was a very good man, but who was Mrs. Waters? Nobody knows, for certain, who she was. Once rich, but quite poor now. I’ll put down their names for the present. If I find I can get along without them, I’ll scratch them off. Then there is Miss Belle Donald. Excellent people, the Donalds. Unfortunate, but good blood flows in their veins. English ancestry, or Scotch,—which is it? Miss Belle is rather *passée*, but she plays a good game of whist and is fond of the married men. And General Baylor and daughter. Colonel James Nichol and wife. Major Penn. But what shall I do with the Flemings? They profess to be great friends of Robert’s, but, for my part, I never admired them. Quite loud, of course, and, besides, their brother is an auctioneer. I shall draw the line right here. The Flemings, and all that set around their neighborhood, can’t visit my house. That’s all about it. They will feel cut, no doubt, but they can stay cut so far as I am concerned. I mustn’t forget Mr. Lawrence Ledbetter. That would never do.” (Mr. Ledbetter was editor and proprietor of the Littleton *Weekly Clarion*.) And

so the list grew until it assumed proportions that were truly alarming.

The invitations were finally issued, and were delivered in a silver card-basket by a bright mulatto boy. From that time until the evening of the party every one about the Claxtons' house was in a state of feverish excitement. Mrs. Claxton was excited. Miss Claxton and Master Claxton were excited; the servants were excited. The big Newfoundland dog caught the infection and barked more loudly than usual. Even the colt in the back-yard kicked up his heels, hoisted his tail, and trotted around in a manner indicative of extreme liveliness. Only Mr. Claxton seemed to preserve his usual imperturbability of manner. It is recorded that, on this momentous occasion, that worthy gentleman evinced not the slightest symptom of excitement, only letting it be known by the extra amount of tobacco he chewed that he was aware of any unusual proceedings in the house.

This fever which first attacked the Claxtons in such malignant form soon spread abroad and infected the houses of near relations and distant connections, and finally became epidemic in the little community. Sociables and card-parties had been frequent in the village since the war, but this was the first grand revival of the old-time, *ante-bellum* ball. And so the party was expected to be in all respects a grand affair.

Meanwhile, at the Claxton's, confusion reigned. The windows were washed, the hallway, the stairway, and the parlor floor were scrubbed, and polished, and waxed, and every portion of the house was dusted and aired for the occasion. The servants hurried in from the neighbors with borrowed china, silver, and glassware. The Baldwins contributed silver spoons and forks; the Temples lent china cups and saucers; the Davies sent cut-glass goblets and dishes; and the Baylors furnished hand-painted dessert-plates.

But the most active field of labor was the kitchen. Here Mrs. Claxton spent almost her entire time, while her husband ate his cold meals alone in one corner of the dining-room. (To do that gentleman justice, he did not seem much depressed by the solitude.) All day long Mrs. Claxton stood at the kitchen-table, her hair twisted into a small cue, and a plain calico apron covering her gingham wrapper, making tea-cakes, and pound-cake, and fruit-cake, until her face was red and her hands weary. And there were peach cream, and chocolate cream, and cream with pineapple and lemon and vanilla flavoring, and a hundred troublesome little things not necessary to be mentioned here.

Mrs. Claxton taxed every energy to make the occasion a brilliant one. She talked about it, labored for it, and dreamed of it, until she was wrought up to the highest pitch of excitement. She was continually

worrying herself with a feverish dread that something might happen to mar the success of the party, so that, when the time finally arrived, she was unfit to entertain her guests with any degree of pleasure to herself or them. In fact, she was worn out and broken down before the day, but under the stimulation of excitement she did not realize her condition.

Thursday came with promise of a most charming evening. But to poor Mrs. Claxton it was a day of toil, and care, and petty annoyances sufficient to worry the life out of her body. A thousand things must be crowded into a few short hours,—things left undone or overlooked until the time was at hand. All the day long Mrs. Claxton flitted about from kitchen to dining-room, from dining-room to parlor; she dragged herself up-stairs; she ran down-stairs; she despatched messengers here and messengers there; she tasted the jelly and sampled the cream; she abused the cook for spoiling the cake; and ended by slamming the door in her husband's face because he mildly suggested that she stand on her head in the corner and rest a little. It was not until dark that she paused for a moment's rest. How utterly broken down she was in body and mind when night came! How unfit she was to enter into the spirit of the occasion with feelings of genuine pleasure! How little did her invited guests, who were coming to enjoy all these good things, know or care

about the untold trouble, and worry, and positive pain they had cost poor Mrs. Claxton!

A glance at the clock revealed to her the fact that she had only half an hour in which to dress before the guests were expected. Carrie had been up-stairs at her toilet for hours. Master Robert was already dressed and at this very moment thumping the piano in the parlor. Just as Mrs. Claxton began her evening toilet her husband entered the room.

"My gracious! wife," he said, looking at his watch, which he held provokingly in his hand, "do you know what time it is?"

"Well, what time is it?"

"It's a quarter to eight, and you are not dressed yet."

"I know it's late, but I can't help it. I haven't had a minute's rest this blessed day! but you,—what have *you* been doing? Stuck over there in your counting-room, reading newspapers and smoking cigars. That's what you've been doing! I think you might have had some consideration for your wife, and come home a little earlier this evening and attended to things yourself a little. That's what I think about it!"

"I had more important matters to attend to."

"More important matters to attend to, did you? Then, when I work my life out of me, trying to make your home decent, and to get up a party that will

reflect credit on your family, you think it a matter of little importance. I just wish I had let the old party alone! I never would have consented to it anyhow, if you hadn't insisted on it."

Mr. Claxton, as the shortest way of escaping a one-sided argument, admitted that the occasion was an important one, and that he had been derelict in duty, in that he had not given it more thought and care.

The toilet was finished, and Mrs. Claxton sat with her husband in her chamber, ready to answer the summons of the bell. For the first time that day quiet reigned in the house. It was the lull in the tempest. Much had been done, but the most difficult and trying part of the ordeal was yet to come.

The hands of the clock were fast approaching nine. Mrs. Claxton grew impatient, and said to her husband, "Don't you think it strange, my dear, the company don't come? It's quite time."

"There's somebody now. Didn't you hear the front gate open?" They listened a moment in silence. The door-bell did not ring, and all was still. Then came the sound of rapidly-approaching footsteps. Nearer and nearer they came, quite up to the gate. Didn't the latch click?

"Who's that, I wonder?" said Mrs. Claxton. The sound died away as the footsteps receded in the distance. Again there was a monotonous silence.

"There!" said Mrs. Claxton, in an excited manner, as she caught the sound of merry laughter through the window, "that's Lizzie Norton's voice. I'd know it anywhere."

The bell rang. Mr. Claxton answered the summons. Mrs. Claxton tiptoed up-stairs and stood leaning over the banister far enough to catch a glimpse of the guests as they arrived.

Old Aunt Sarah appeared with a large white cap over her dark, nappy hair, and conducted "de ladies up-sta'rs ter de dressin'-room." The gentlemen deposited their hats and gloves upon the hall-table, and, after glancing in the mirror, walked with stately tread into the parlor, where they sat gazing into each other's faces with an air of blank solemnity. Up-stairs in the ladies' room the scene was very lively and animated, and in striking contrast to the funereal gathering below.

By nine o'clock all the guests had arrived, and the ladies came down to the parlor, to enliven by their presence.

Mrs. Norton threw herself upon a sofa, and turned her large eyes full upon Pleasant Waters. He was in the act of crossing the room to join Winnie and Helen, who were engaged in a *tête-à-tête* in the corner, when Mrs. Norton said to him, "Mr. Pleas, I have been saving this seat *expressly* for you." And she pointed

to a seat on the sofa beside her. "Do come and sit down. It's so stupid being by one's self, you know."

Pleasant moved towards the sofa, but just before taking his seat Miss Cecelia Temple, who stood watching the widow's little game, came quickly across the room, and seated herself at the other end of the sofa, remarking as she did so, "Mithter Waterth, I'm going to take thith theat, and let you thit between Mithist Norton and mythelf. A rothe between two thorns, you know." And she laughed her quick nervous little laugh at the compliment paid "Mithter Waterth."

Pleasant sat down between the two thorns. The thorn on his left, Miss Cecelia Temple, was a lively, chatty little body, so chock-full of words that they continually tripped one another up in their hurried efforts to get safely out of her mouth, but they generally got badly mutilated before making good their escape. She was a very excitable creature, and would go off into transports of rapturous admiration over anything that she liked. She liked everybody in general, but the gentlemen in particular.

Cecelia was all excitement at finding herself in such delightful proximity to a gentleman of such splendid appearance as Mithter Waterth. She at once opened upon him a perfect volley of words, which came so thick and fast that he would have beat a hasty retreat had he not been effectually barricaded by the hand-

some widow lolling languidly at his other side. And so Cecelia chatted and sputtered away at a lively rate, pausing only long enough between her sentences to take breath or to utter a half-affected little laugh. Mrs. Norton lapsed into silence from very disgust that her scheme to monopolize the attentions of Pleasant for the evening had been so early thwarted by this "pert little busybody."

Pleasant endeavored to listen with respectful attention to the flow, or, rather, the sputter of words, and replied in monosyllables at what he deemed appropriate intervals. But his thoughts played truant the while, and his eyes were constantly wandering in the direction of Winnie and Helen, who were enjoying his discomfiture and embarrassment from the other side of the room.

How he longed to exchange all this glare, and music, and bustle for a few moments in the quiet porch of the little cottage, or under the spreading boughs of the old oak, beneath the calm starlight, with only Helen beside him!

"Mr. Waters," said Mrs. Claxton suddenly, recalling him to consciousness of his surroundings, "get your partner for the first set. The dance will commence in a few minutes."

Strange he had not thought of this before! Here was truly an embarrassing position. He must choose

between the two thorns, but how could he choose one without an apparent slight to the other? He hesitated, but the longer he waited the more painful seemed the task.

Mrs. Norton, who was shrewder than her rival at the other end of the sofa, quickly discovered his embarrassment, and suddenly brightening up, said, "Now, Mr. Pleas, you surely haven't forgotten that we have the first set? I know you haven't a *vis-à-vis* yet. Do go at once and find us one."

Pleasant had not the slightest recollection of making any such engagement with Mrs. Norton, but *her* recollection of it was a great and timely relief, and so he arose and offered his arm, with an apology for failing to remember so important an engagement.

As the fair widow, leaning tenderly on her partner's arm, glided out of the room, she cast a defiant glance over her shoulder at the forlorn Cecelia, as if to say, "Now, I guess we are even, my dear!"

There was now a general movement towards the dining-room, where the fair ladies and gallant gentlemen were expected to engage in the pleasant pastime of the old Virginia dance. In a few minutes the parlor was almost entirely deserted, only Miss Belle Donald and a few elderly married gentlemen remaining to engage in a game of whist.

In one corner of the dancing-room, in split-bottomed

chairs placed on a broad table, sat as lively a trio of musicians as ever resined a bow. They were all "dark-skinned gemmen." Uncle Amos, whose fame as a fiddler had gone abroad in the land, was "de leader," Scipio Goode played "de second," and old Joe Bowers manipulated "de base."

After a deal of trouble the partners were arranged, and Pleasant and his partner found themselves opposite the fair Cecelia, who had succeeded in capturing Master Robert Claxton between the parlor and the ball-room.

The music began, and with it the dancing. Above the noise of shuffling feet, the hum of voices, and the shriek of the fiddles were heard the sharp, shrill tones of Uncle Amos as he sang out, "S'lute yer pardners! Fuss gemmen on de right cross ober! Fuss lady de same! Ladies change! Han's all roun'! Back ter yer places! Doshy doe!" and all to the tune of "The Chicken on the Bread-trough," occasionally relieved by "The Rabbit in the Pea-patch."

Some of the young people's countenances were radiant with joy; others looked as solemn and sad as if attending the funeral of some dear departed friend.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Claxton was the busiest of the busy. She peeped in at the dance a moment, and smiled sweetly; she stopped in the parlor awhile, and talked pleasantly; she entered the kitchen finally, and—lost her temper.

Promptly at twelve the dancing stopped, and the couples returned to the parlor, or promenaded the hall, or strolled out on the porch to enjoy the cool air and the pleasant breeze. Meanwhile, supper was being prepared in the dining-room that so lately echoed to the shriek of fiddles and the shuffling of dainty slippers.

When Pleasant re-entered the parlor, the fair Cecelia was leaning upon his arm, he having in some way become her partner for the next set. Helen was sitting at the piano, leisurely turning the leaves of a folio of music. After numerous and urgent solicitations, she had consented to sing "just one song." When it was known that Helen was to sing, the promenaders in the hall and the strollers on the porch gathered in the parlor and crowded around the instrument, and even the whist-players paused in their game.

One of Helen's chief attractions was her power of song. She had fine natural gifts, which had been much improved by cultivation. Her voice was full, rich, and singularly sweet. But there was never any certainty whether Helen would sing or no. It all depended upon her mood. Frequently she was not in a mood to sing, and, at such times, entreaty was of no avail. She was like the birds of the forest, that sing sweetest when alone. Sometimes she would steal into the parlor at home, when the house was deserted,

and there, all alone, pour out her soul in a flow of melody.

To-night she began the accompaniment of some simple, plaintive air, changed to "Yankee Doodle," and finally dropped into "Dixie." "There!" thought Winnie, with a feeling of disappointment, "Helen has begun one of her wild frolics on the piano, and will stop without the song." But presently Helen stopped thumping the piano, and turned the leaves of the folio until she came to one of Winnie's favorites. As she began the song, Pleasant, be it said to his shame, wholly forgot the fair Cecelia by his side, and, deliberately moving away from her without so much as an apology, joined the throng around the piano.

Helen's voice had never sounded so well as it did that evening. So thought Winnie, and so thought Pleasant as his ear drank in every note. The melody touched his heart, and thrilled his very soul.

"It came o'er his ear like the sweet South,
That breathes upon a bank of violets."

The words of Jean Paul Richter, when listening to the strains of soul-inspiring music, came upon him to-night in all their hidden meaning,—"Away! Away! Thou speakest to me of those things which in all my born days I have not known, and shall never know."

While these words were passing through his mind, Helen, without any warning, changed her song to "The cow jumped over the moon." The contrast was ludicrous, no doubt, but to Pleasant it was painful. But as he walked home that night, he remembered only Helen's beautiful song, for he said to Winnie,—

"I have read somewhere that if a woman can sing, or play on some musical instrument, all her wickedness will run off through her throat or the tips of her fingers. I go further, and say that a woman who can sing with a power that stirs men's souls is endowed with a gift that is divine, and is possessed of a heart where love and sympathy must find lodgment."

When the hour of one arrived supper was announced, and again there was a general movement to the dining-room. The ladies were seated next to the wall, around the room. The gentlemen waited on them from the table that stood in the centre. Mrs. Claxton had loaded her table with—but if the reader is curious to know just what Mrs. Claxton did load her table with that night, he is respectfully referred to the columns of the *Littleton Weekly Clarion*, on file at the office. The list contained in the aforesaid columns is perfectly accurate, having been made out by none other than Mrs. Claxton herself, who handed it

to Mr. Lawrence Ledbetter before his departure, with the modest request that he insert it in his account of the grand affair.

By three o'clock the "Great Social Event of the Season" was over, and the last guest had departed.

"Thank heavens it's all over!" said poor Mrs. Claxton, with a sigh of relief, as she closed the front door and sought her chamber. She was worn out in mind and body and needed rest, but the remainder of the night was spent in waking moments and feverish dreams. Next morning she woke to the consciousness that all was not over. The heavy work was done, but the field had yet to be cleared of the wreckage that lay strewn in every direction. Spoons, knives, and forks, plates, dishes, and what not must be collected, carefully counted, and returned to their respective owners. And, as one good turn deserves another, she could not return empty dishes. The hall, the parlor, the ladies' room, the kitchen, all were in a state of chaos which seemed a herculean task to set in order. Master Robert Claxton still slumbered in his room, while poor Carrie, with unstrung nerves and aching head, lay tossing upon her bed up-stairs.

"I hope I may die," said Mrs. Claxton, "if ever I go through the like again."

Mr. Claxton, in response to an inquiry at the breakfast-table a few days after, gave it as his opinion that

the party was quite a success, "barring the fuss and feathers." But it is to be presumed that these last words, which were feebly uttered, fell short of Mrs. Claxton's ears, as that lady made no reply to the unworthy intimation.

CHAPTER XVII.

JOSIAH BALDWIN sat in his counting-room, with his morning mail unopened before him. Smiles and frowns alternately played over his face. His deep-laid plans were about to be thwarted, and by the will of so frail a creature as a woman, and therefore he frowned; but vengeance was his, and vengeance is sweet, and therefore he smiled. But Baldwin's smiles were not always omens of peace, they were more often portents of some evil or sinister designs. This morning his frowns were caused by a deep sense of mortification and wounded pride. In his smiles were ghastly suggestions.

"How preposterously absurd and foolish it was," soliloquized Baldwin, "for that proud widow to reject the best chance of her life,—the best chance, not excepting Colonel Waters himself! Well, madam, we'll see who is master of the situation. Josiah Baldwin ain't the man to be toasted and flattered, and then trampled underfoot; as if he was nothing at all; not by a long shot he ain't. That ain't the kind of stuff Josiah Baldwin is made of. I'll show those stuck-up Waters how little their pride shall avail them. I

offered her a splendid home for life. If she don't choose to accept it, I'll take from her what little she has left. By the living God, I'll do it! She don't want a home, eh? Her children will provide for her, eh? How she drew herself up, and swelled with pride, and flashed defiance from her eye, when I threatened her with the mortgage! She told me to do my worst. Proud, foolish, silly woman, Josiah Baldwin will show you that when he says a thing he means it."

These remarks he uttered in an incoherent manner, emphasizing them now and then by bringing his fist violently down on the table. Having thus delivered himself, he became calmer, and, taking his accustomed seat at his desk, proceeded to open his mail. There were letters from good old sisters of the church begging for a small donation towards the erection of a house of the Lord, circulars from the associations for the relief of the sick and indigent, and various appeals to his charity and liberality. Upon all such documents he bestowed a hasty glance and thrust them into the waste-basket. Only letters of business—that is, pertaining to his particular business as merchant or banker—ever received more than a passing notice.

Of the letters received this morning there was one that claimed more than a simple perusal; in fact, it was read with an all-absorbing interest, and ran as follows:

"RED GULCH, CAL., ———, 18—.

"JOSIAH BALDWIN, ESQ.

"MY DEAR SIR,—I suppose my friend Waters has long ago apprised you of the fact that, prior to my departure for the West, I placed in his hands your bond, executed by you to me in the sum of three thousand dollars, the purchase price of my lands in ———, and that I authorized him to collect this bond, if at any time I should need the money, or whenever, in his judgment, it was to my interest to do so. I do not for a moment wish to call upon you for the money if in any way it shall interfere with your present business arrangements. If, however, you have no immediate need for the money, and can place it where I can realize something more than simple interest, I shall take it as a great kindness.

"Will you please advise Waters as to the proper investment, the money to be paid over to him at the proper time, and he to make the investment under your direction? Relying upon your past friendship and the lively interest you have heretofore manifested in my welfare, I feel that I can safely intrust the matter to your sound judgment.

"Rest assured, sir, that whatever you do shall be satisfactory to me.

"I shall say nothing to Waters as to the contents of this letter, so that, should you conclude to make no

other disposition of the money at present, you need not trouble him by reference to the subject, but may allow matters to stand as they are until my return to Virginia.

"Since my sojourn here I have had some pretty rough experience. I have made little more than a living, and am often tempted to pull up stakes and return to my dear old native State.

"What is the matter with Helen? I am afraid she is about to forget me entirely, or, at least, is growing quite indifferent to me. I haven't had a line from her for nearly three months, though I have written repeatedly. I shall have to ask your kind services in this matter also.

"With best wishes for you and yours, I remain sincerely and truly yours,

"RICHARD BENTLEY."

For some moments after the perusal of this epistle the old merchant sat as one overcome by wonder and astonishment. That smile of ghastly suggestion played about his mouth, and his clinched fist came down heavily upon the desk.

"Ah, the rascal!" he muttered. "The infamous rascal! Never opened his lips to me about that bond! I understand it, sir,—understand it all. Pleasant Waters will pay me off with somebody else's

money, will he? That's the reason you are so independent, you proud, haughty, little widow! 'Pride goeth before a fall,' so 'tis said. I'll see what your pride will bring you to. This letter is a God-send to me. Without it I'd have been caught in a pretty box, wouldn't I? But I'll catch somebody else in the trap that was set for me. I'll lay low, and say nothing about this letter until the rascal comes to demand payment of the bond. He'll be sure to demand it before the day of sale. When he does I'll confront him with this letter and laugh at his confusion. Josiah Baldwin is no fool,—but not so fast. I have been a fool to allow that fellow to visit my house and try to rob me of my Helen. But it's not too late to put a stop to that foolishness. I'll block that little game in short order. But now to business. I'll go to my attorney and instruct him to foreclose that mortgage without delay. I guess that will bring matters to a head!"

With these remarks, Baldwin arose, and, closing the door behind him, proceeded on his mission.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FEW evenings after Baldwin's visit to the attorney's office, Pleasant Waters was returning from Brook Farm to the village. It was a glorious day to be abroad; one of those delightful autumn days that come only to the favored Piedmont region of Virginia. An Indian-summer day, with its golden haze motionless in glen and valley, like a kind of "shining nimbus," full of subtle, pervasive sentiment.

Infinitely tender and beautiful lay the great stretch of forest, with its foliage of prismatic tints, sleeping in the sunlight. Here and there along the wooded slopes were slowly reddening oaks, and crimson gums, and maples in their coats of gray and green and scarlet. Clusters of hickories and tall poplars, grandly beautiful, intensely golden, stood motionless and silent. The grand old mountains, clothed in gay livery, lifted their proud forms heavenward, their jagged outlines cut sharply into the deep blue sky. As Pleasant looked upon those rugged heights he felt that they were never grander or more beautiful than to-day. His attachment to them had never been stronger than now. Between him and them was a bond of sympathy that

could never be broken. They were the witnesses of his birth; they were the mute guardians of his life; and in death he desired no sweeter resting-place than under the shadow of their friendly heights.

Nature was very gay that day. Everything that came in contact with her felt the subtle influence of her touch. Pleasant felt it as he walked homeward along the winding road. His spirits were high, and he was happy without knowing just why he was so. He enjoyed the pure air, the sunshine, the songs of birds, and the pleasant odors of the wildwood. Tempted, too, by the game that abounded in the country, he loitered so long by the way that, when he reached the village and turned in at the old gate, the sun was low down in the west. His game-bag, filled with quails, squirrels, and woodchucks, he gave to Aunt Emily, who received it with a gracious smile, and hastened away to the kitchen to prepare the game for "de missus."

Winnie, with a face bright and cheerful, was leaning on the front gate, impatiently awaiting her brother's coming. When she caught sight of his manly form approaching the cottage, she threw open the gate and ran to meet him with a hearty embrace and a loving kiss upon his sunburned forehead. Hand in hand the sister and brother, happy in each other's society, walked towards the house to meet their mother, who greeted them upon the humble threshold.

Mrs. Waters was delighted to have her son at home again, but a look prophetic of impending trouble dwelt upon her usually calm and happy countenance. After supper she handed Pleasant two letters. One, whose seal was already broken, was addressed to Mrs. Waters. He opened it and read as follows :

“ MRS. WATERS.

“ MADAM,—At the instance of Mr. Josiah Baldwin, the beneficiary in a certain deed of trust executed by you to me, as trustee, I hereby notify you that unless the debt mentioned in said deed is paid forthwith I shall, after reasonable notice, proceed to make sale of the property therein mentioned, by way of public auction, to the highest bidder.

“ Respectfully,

“ J. SINGLETON LEGGS, Trustee,
and Att’y for JOSIAH BALDWIN.”

No word escaped his lips when he read this letter. Its contents were no surprise to him, for he expected such a step to be taken at any time.

The other letter was addressed “ Pleasant Waters, Esq.,” and read as follows :

“ SIR,—Your visits to my house have been frequent of late. From this time they must be stopped. All

further communication between my family and yours must end. I have given my own family orders to the same effect.

“JOSIAH BALDWIN.”

When he finished the perusal of this latter epistle indignation was stamped upon his manly brow. His first impulse was to go at once and demand an explanation of Baldwin. Upon reflection, however, he saw that nothing could be accomplished by such a course. And yet he was puzzled to know the meaning of this strange communication. True, he had visited the Baldwins frequently, but nearly always in company with his sister. He had never told Helen that he loved her. On the contrary, he had studiously acted in such a manner as to induce her to believe that he was simply the mutual friend and confidant of Bentley and herself. From the intimate relations that had sprung up between Helen and himself he had grown fond of her, and if her engagement to Bentley, the only apparent obstacle between them, were removed, he might ask her to become his wife. But this was a contingency not to be dreamed of.

And how was it with Helen? Had she ever bestowed a tender thought upon Pleasant? It might be so, he sometimes thought. But such thoughts should have no place in his mind now, and he would dis-

miss them forever, and address himself at once to the important business brought to his attention by the attorney's letter.

After tea he went to his room, and opening his trunk, took therefrom a small package and carefully untied the dusty ribbon around it. From the package he took a soiled paper, the same intrusted to him by Bentley when they parted upon the tented field. What business had he with it now?

Cautiously depositing the paper in his pocket, he left the house and turned his footsteps towards the village. The moon had not yet arisen, but the darkness was relieved by the stars, "chaste eyes of the night," gleaming kindly amidst the gloom. The outlines of the mountain could be distinctly discerned in the distance, but its form, magnified to almost double its true proportions, was like some awful presence. Pleasant, absorbed in thought, took no notice of his surroundings but walked rapidly on, like one bent upon some desperate errand. He passed through the yard gate, on by the church and parsonage, across the bridge, and into the main street. The street lamps were burning dimly, and some of the stores had not yet closed. On the corners, and in the middle of the streets, the boys were at their evening sports, while after-tea smokers were leisurely enjoying the pleasures of an autumn twilight.

When he reached Baldwin's corner, he found the store closed, but a light gleamed faintly through the window of the little counting-room. Pleasant approached softly and looked in. The old merchant was seated alone at his desk, with the great ledger spread out before him.

"Is it right?" whispered Pleasant, as his trembling hand rested on the latch of the office door. "Why not?" he again muttered, hesitating to enter. "I can replace the money before Bentley will call for it. It will be a relief to me just now and a great triumph over the old rascal. I am empowered to collect the money, and Baldwin will surely not refuse to pay upon demand. But,"—and his hand fell from the latch to his side,—“after all, have I the warrant for this? Bentley's express desire was that the old man should not be annoyed unless the money was needed. And yet, could Bentley know the spirit that moves old Baldwin to oppress us in this way, he would gladly approve my action.”

His hand again moved towards the latch and clasped it, only to drop suddenly to his side as if smitten by some powerful force. "No, no," he said. "I am wrong. I would dishonor myself. I would betray the trust reposed in me by my best and truest friend. Let Baldwin do his worst. As for me, I will be true to my trust." And turning hastily from the door, he

retraced his steps into the street and back towards the cottage home.

The moon rose full-orbed above the eastern hills, shooting its golden gleams athwart his path. Innumerable stars throbbed in the vast vault of the heavens. Weird shadows flitted about the trees like ghosts of the dead past. The ruins of the old mansion seemed never so weirdly lonely and forsaken as to-night. For one brief sad moment he paused to gaze upon the crumbling ruins as they lay there overgrown with ivy and flooded by the mellow moonlight.

Suddenly he became conscious of a presence near him. And then he felt the touch of a familiar hand, and the soft pressure of a loving arm twining itself gently in his.

"I know it all," she said. "For my sake, forgive him, and visit it not upon one who hopes never to forfeit your friendship."

"Oh, Helen! Helen, my love!" And he clasped her to his heart, and passionately kissed the fair young cheek that nestled upon his manly bosom.

CHAPTER XIX.

"LITTLETON, VA., ———, 18—.

"RICHARD BENTLEY, ESQ.

"MY DEAR SIR,—Come to Virginia at once. Things have taken such shape that delay may be your ruin. Your friend, Waters, has acted the rascal. You see, I held a mortgage on the Waters property for money and supplies furnished Mrs. Waters and family. As she could not pay off the mortgage, I directed my attorney to foreclose. Now, what do you suppose was done? On the very day the sale was to take place her son went to my attorney and coolly paid off the last cent. How did he do it? There's the rub. Neither he nor his mother had any means to pay the debt. I am informed and believe that he raised the money by using as collateral security the bond intrusted by you to his keeping. I learn from good authority that he did this thing. I am satisfied that he did it, because the very next day I made demand upon him for the bond through my attorney, and he refused to respond. I will find out where he has placed it. I ought to have demanded the bond when I received

your letter, and my failure to do so has, I fear, cost you its value.

“But this isn’t all the rascal is guilty of. He has taken advantage of your absence to betray your confidence by seeking to win the affections of my daughter. But I have blocked that game. He visits my house no longer, and Helen is not permitted to have any communication with him. Come as soon as you receive this letter. Don’t delay.

“Your friend,

“JOSIAH BALDWIN.”

Nearly a month after the above letter was written, a gentleman clad in travelling suit, with valise in hand, stepped from the train to the platform of the Littleton depot. He was begrimed with the dust of a long journey, and his sunburnt features gave evidence of having felt the rude touch of the elements. He entered the hotel and registered in bold characters the name of “Richard Bentley—California.”

Five years’ sojourn in the mines and gulches of that State had wrought marked changes in Bentley. He had lost the ruddy, healthy complexion, the bright, quick flash of the eye, and the elastic step that were his in days gone by. The most casual observer, had he known the Richard Bentley of war times, would have noted these changes at a glance. Time was when

he prided himself upon the neatness of his personal attire, but to-day he was carelessly dressed, and his appearance was what is sometimes denominated "slouchy." His was the look of a man who had seen better days, but who, in these later years, had suffered from "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." He was like the young man who followed the advice of the sage to "go West," but who, after many hard knocks and much delving in ditches and digging in mines, returned penniless and shamefaced to the old home.

Bentley had long lamented his folly in deserting his native State for one so uncongenial to his tastes and natural pursuits. But he was too proud, after boasting so much and accomplishing so little, to return, and find that, after all, those who remained in their native State had accomplished far more towards repairing their lost fortunes than had he in the fabulous gold-fields of the glorious West. But when Baldwin's letter came he no longer hesitated. What more potent reason could there be for his speedy return to Virginia? And so we find him to-day, after years of absence, leaning over the old register of the Littleton hotel and entering his name upon the blotted page.

CHAPTER XX.

AFTER supper (the inhabitants of Littleton ate supper at six) Bentley lit his cigar and walked out into the street. Hardly a decade had passed since he walked there, but within these few years the village had grown into a busy, bustling little town. Steam-whistles in machine-shops and tobacco-factories were screaming out the closing day. Heavily-laden farm-wagons were moving in and out, and groups of hilarious farmers gathered around the camp-fires in the warehouse yards. The workmen upon the new building were descending from the scaffold, and the laborer was returning from his daily toil. Blooming maidens and mature matrons passed him on his way, and the merry shout of the urchin, "out of school," made his heart glad.

He paused a moment before Baldwin's store and watched the clerks at the counters, but recognizing none of the busy workers, passed on towards the bridge. When he reached the top of the hill beyond the railroad, the sun was just hiding his face behind the towering crest of the Blue Ridge Mountains, and the long shadows of the peaks were creeping over the

deep valley to eastward. Around him lay the busy, bustling little town, and beyond was the great stretch of woodland, open field, and green meadow; while the long range of blue mountains, outlined against the evening sky, completed the picture.

Bentley had stood on the summit of the Rocky Mountains and gazed upon the matchless splendor of their sunsets. The scene there was grand, but it was wild and lonely in its grandeur, for no sweet memories nor hallowed associations clustered about it. But the scene he now looked upon was tenderly beautiful, while its quiet, homelike splendor touched him as no other scene in all the world could have done.

Instead of deserted houses and a desolate land, he saw around him a growing, thriving town, and upon every face was a smile of sweet content. A few short years of peace had transformed a land of mourning into a land of gladness, poverty had given place to plenty, and all the horrors of war were forgotten in the onward march to material wealth and prosperity.

But it was quite time for Bentley to return to the hotel and seek a night of much-needed rest. Tomorrow he must confront his former friend and comrade, and wring from him the confession of his perfidy.

When he reached a point nearly opposite Josiah Baldwin's residence he paused and thought of Helen, and wondered whether, if she knew he was at that

moment standing before her father's gate, she would come tripping out to meet him.

The sun had dropped behind the mountains, suffusing the western sky with a golden glory. Anon the twilight came down and wrapped the town in its amber mantle. Presently the moon rose.

Bentley still lingered, loath to leave without a glimpse of the woman he loved, but now a couple were approaching from the opposite direction, just in his way to the main street.

"A pair of silly lovers, no doubt," thought he, "tempted by the moon's pale light. A lady and gentleman: I'll step under this old cedar in the yard until they pass."

Scarcely had he time to step from the path and conceal himself behind the thick shrubbery when the couple were upon him. They were so near him that he easily recognized by the moonlight Pleasant Waters and Helen Baldwin, as they sat down upon a rustic bench under the old cedar-trees.

In Bentley's position he could hear every word spoken. He regretted bitterly the awkward situation in which he had placed himself, but it was impossible to escape without making known his presence. To be the unwilling listener to a conversation not intended for his ears was exceedingly unpleasant, but to be made the witness of the treachery of his friend and

the perfidy of his affianced was almost too painful to be borne. Would it not be better, after all, to make himself known? No. It was best, perhaps, that the matter should now be settled forever. If proof was needed of his friend's base betrayal of confidence, here it was. The accused himself was on the stand and about to testify.

"I have disobeyed my father's express injunction in this meeting with you," said Helen. "I may have committed a wrong in disobeying him, but I felt that a greater wrong would be done did I not seek an interview with you and tell you all the reasons that induced him to act as he has in this matter. You have been falsely accused of committing a great wrong, Mr. Waters, your honor has been assailed——"

Pleasant started up at these words, but she grasped his hand, and he sat silent beside her.

"You have been accused, tried, and convicted without so much as being confronted with your accusers, without even the privilege of one single word in your behalf—except—yes, I, and I alone, have defended you against these unjust aspersions. I alone have declared you innocent. I feel that all you need or desire is a true statement of the charges against you, and the opportunity to vindicate your honor by wiping out even the breath of a suspicion.

"This is why I have disobeyed my father and sought

this interview to-night. I am here, Mr. Waters, as your friend, believing most confidently in your innocence, to tell you all that I have heard, and to gather from your own lips the true statement of this most unfortunate affair. Have I done wrong, Mr. Waters? Have I?"

She paused for a reply, and, plucking a blossom that grew at her feet, scattered its velvet petals upon the grounds. The wanton winds gathered them up and tossed them back upon her lap or laid them in the light of the moon upon her bosom.

Pleasant did not undertake to settle the right or the wrong of Helen's action in disobeying her father. He simply said,—

"I have my theory, Helen, at least in part, as to your father's strange conduct towards our family, but I must confess that, in other respects, his treatment of us, and especially myself, is simply inexplicable. But if you are to be my fair informer, I shall take a kind of melancholy pleasure in listening while you rehearse the grave charges your father has preferred against me. I am greatly at a loss to know what fancied wrong could make him so far forget himself as to seek vengeance on an innocent man. In my case your father seems to have acted as prosecutor, judge, and jury, and, of course, he had little trouble in arriving at a verdict of guilty, and thereupon he sentences me to eternal banishment from his house.

"His own opinion of me can be of little moment, but there is one cause, and but one, of regret in this affair. Your company, Helen, has been a source of unfailing pleasure to me. Your friendship, which I believe to be true and lasting, has been my comfort and joy. Must I be deprived of your sweet companionship because this vindictive old man—No, I will not make harsh or unkind remarks about your father. I would not make them to you, even if I thought harshly or unkindly of him. For your sake, Helen, I am willing to be charitable and cherish as little bitterness as possible.

"But must we, because of your father's strange command, be separated forever?"

She leaned gently upon his arm and lifted her face, passing beautiful in the moonlight, and gazed tenderly into the earnest face of the man beside her.

"Must we separate forever?" he repeated.

There was no answer. A breath of air, all unseen, stirred the foliage, and caught up a velvet leaf that lay upon her bosom and whisked it round and round until it fell upon Bentley's sunburnt hand. He hastily brushed it away as he would some horrid creeping reptile of the wood.

"Listen to me," said Helen at length, "and, when I am done, answer me from your heart and conscience, and that answer shall be to me the truth forever."

Bentley, sitting under the dark shrubbery, looking upon her fair face and even into the clear depth of her eyes, saw written there his own doom.

She went on to tell Pleasant that her father had talked freely to her about all of his business matters, and especially so far as they were connected with the Waters family and Richard Bentley. She detailed fully all the correspondence between Bentley and her father with reference to the bond held by Pleasant, and what disposition her father believed had been made of the bond.

"Mr. Bentley," said she, "may arrive to-day or to-morrow. Certainly he will be here in a few days, and, as you perceive, he comes with his mind poisoned by foul suspicion of you. As soon as I heard of his determination to return to Virginia, I felt it my duty to inform you at once, that you might be prepared to confront him and your accusers, and make them acknowledge, as I know you will, the great wrong they do you in even suspecting you of treachery to your friend or unfaithfulness to the trust reposed in you."

Bentley heard these words of Helen,—heard them all.

"They must be wormwood and gall," thought he, "to the heart and conscience of Waters if he is guilty. But if innocent (and no one more than I would rejoice to see my long-trusted friend come forth with

no stain upon the fair character he has so long borne),—how great the wrong done him, and how quickly should reparation be made!”

Pleasant sat for some moments in silence. Much of what Helen had told him was new to him. He now began to understand more clearly the strange conduct of Baldwin, and to account for this sudden antipathy. He was not only surprised at what had been told him, he was shocked, indignant. And then, for a moment, his mind went back to the night when he stood with Bentley's bond in his pocket and his hand upon the latch of the counting-room door. How great had been the temptation! How narrow the escape! Had not Baldwin, at that critical moment, in his possession Bentley's letter empowering him to demand the bond if he so desired? Had he attempted to collect the bond, would not Baldwin have confronted him with that letter and put him to very shame? The blood rushed to his face as he felt that the grave charges of dishonest purposes were already half true. But when he thought of the littleness and the meanness of old Baldwin, his innocence once more asserted itself. He had been guilty of no wrongful act or deed. He had been sorely tempted, and had come out victorious. But this man had accused him of base ingratitude and downright dishonesty. His character was assailed, and he must prepare to confront the as-

sailants, and assert his innocence before them and the world.

"Helen," he began, "I beg that you will pardon me if I say anything that shall offend you. Such is not my purpose, but since mine honor, which is dearer to me than life itself, has been so wantonly assailed, I must defend it be the consequences what they may. I have nothing to conceal, and since you grant me this opportunity, I shall give a true history of my past life, so far as it is connected with the affairs of Bentley and your father and his family. You shall be the judge of my actions and motives throughout it all, whether for right or wrong."

And now he went back to the parting scene between Bentley and himself on that memorable night when the troops under General Johnston were disbanded. He told her of the parting words, of the trust reposed in him by Bentley, and the promise made under those solemn circumstances; he spoke of his return to his ruined home, of the impoverished condition in which he found his affairs, and especially of the distressing poverty of his mother and sister; how his mother had sought help from Baldwin and obtained it by mortgaging all of her remaining property; he alluded to the kind forbearance of Baldwin in not enforcing his claim at once, and to the many little acts of kindness shown him and his mother under the

trying circumstances; he passed lightly over his own hard struggle on Brook Farm, extolled the self-sacrifice of his mother and the noble example of his sister, who had given up without a murmur the luxuries and refinements of home in the hard struggle for support. And now he came to the beginning of what he believed to be the cause of the estrangement between Baldwin and himself, which so soon terminated in open rupture. He told of Baldwin's attentions to Mrs. Waters, and of his mother's determination never, under any circumstances, to marry again, and the pain with which he had seen, day by day, Baldwin's growing purpose to make a proposal of marriage, which could only result in a firm and positive rejection.

Said he, continuing, "In spite of all efforts to prevent what must be so unpleasant to my mother and what might prove a deep mortification to your father, he found an opportunity to make the proposal. Of course, it was kindly but firmly rejected. Strangely enough, your father was offended, and even fancied himself insulted, because my mother exercised her undeniable right, and gave him the answer which her common sense dictated as the only proper one. More than that, he fancied that I was the prime cause of this rejection of his proposals, and from that time he openly declared his purpose to be avenged of this fancied wrong. He knew of no better means than a

strict and speedy enforcement of his claim, which would, as he thought, strip us of the last remnant of property and throw us penniless upon the world. To enforce his claim (which was a just one) and to deprive us of our property was his legal right. I have no complaint to lodge against him or any other man on that score. Nor have I a right to judge his motives except from the words that fell from his own lips. But when he prohibited all further communication with his family and denied me even the hospitality of his house, I must confess I was hurt and offended. Conscious of having committed no wrong, I felt that I did not deserve such treatment at his hands.

"And now," he continued, "I come to that which reflects upon my honor. This attempt to besmirch my character by imputing to me dishonest acts or motives is a complete revelation to me, for I assure you, until I heard it from your lips, I never dreamed that such an accusation had been made against me. But in seeking this means of redress for a fancied wrong, or in supposing me capable of betraying the trust reposed in me by Bentley, your father has greatly miscalculated. If I have succeeded in relieving our property of this encumbrance, I have resorted to no doubtful means to accomplish it. Upon the very day fixed for the sale your father, greatly to his surprise, I

must believe, was paid every dollar of his debt. He was puzzled for the time, no doubt, to know just how the money was raised. Naturally enough, he bethought himself of his bond to Bentley, which he knew had been placed in my hands with power to collect. Without investigation he reached the conclusion that I had made use of this evidence of debt to secure the means of paying off my private indebtedness. When a demand was subsequently made upon me for the bond, followed by a refusal on my part to produce it, his suspicions were confirmed. Thereupon he indites an epistle to Bentley embodying what he conceives to be the facts of the case.

“Now, what are the facts? For these five years past Winnie has worked like a slave, you know, but her industry was rewarded, and the fruits of that industry carefully husbanded until quite a snug little sum was accumulated. Brook Farm, under the management of good Mr. Michael, assisted by my poor help, has yielded more than sufficient for our needs. Besides this, Michael, who is a very frugal as well as a very industrious man, had ‘laid by’ a considerable sum for a rainy day. When the rainy day came, we three, Winnie, Michael, and myself, put our heads and purses together, and, without going into details, paid off the entire indebtedness.

“That’s the simple story, Helen. I may have been

tempted sometimes ; which of us is not ? But, however strong the temptation, it was overcome. I have kept my promise, and, as far as in me lay, have been true to the friend of my youth.

“ And should Bentley stand before me to-night, I could say, and God be my witness, ‘ Here, friend, here is the charge thou gavest, ’ ”—and he drew from his pocket a paper,—“ ‘ here is the obligation entrusted to my keeping, and here ’ ”—and he laid his hand on Helen’s arm—“ ‘ is the woman—God bless her—whom I have loved and tenderly watched over for thy sake. ’ ”

Softly, but distinctly, these words fell upon Bentley’s ear, and as he listened the truth dawned upon him clear as noonday. How nobly true had been the man, how falsely mean were his accusers ! Bentley’s heart went out to his old friend, and he longed to rush from his concealment and assure him of his belief in his innocence and of his unswerving friendship, which must last until life’s end. Was not this the golden opportunity ? But yet, so sudden an appearance, and under such suspicious circumstances, might not be an agreeable surprise. Not yet ;—to-morrow—he would wait until to-morrow.

Pleasant was silent now. The ivy trembled unnoticed in the moonlight. Presently, the silence was broken by the tender tones of Helen’s voice.

"I knew it," she said; "I knew it. Father was wrong. I told him he was wrong,—that you were too good and noble to be guilty of these things. When Mr. Bentley comes you will be vindicated, and then—but good-night. I have lingered too long already, I fear. I must go now, or father will miss me. Good-night."

He grasped her hand, and as he silently pressed it to his lips she whispered, but not too softly for Bentley's ear, "He is my friend, as he is yours. He can be nothing more." In a moment she had passed from under the trees and was out of sight.

Pleasant was alone under the night sky. The moon was just peeping above the tree-tops. Its mellow sheen flooded the open squares and poured in silver streams through the tangled foliage. The stars gleamed faintly in the great sweeping vault of heaven.

He moved slowly down the path. He had gone but a few steps when he suddenly paused. The tall figure of a man stood before him. The man drew near and extended his hand. As he did so the moon bursting through the rift of a passing cloud shone full upon him, disclosing the form and features of Richard Bentley.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHEN Bentley grasped the hand of his friend, it was with a warmth and a cordiality that should have left no room to doubt the sincerity of his pleasure in the meeting. But it was so sudden, so unexpected, the time so inopportune, and the circumstances so peculiar, that Pleasant was not only surprised but greatly embarrassed.

"Bentley!" he exclaimed. "What can this mean?"

"What can this mean, do you ask?" said Bentley. "It means that I, Richard Bentley, stand here before you. I mean no treason. What do *you* mean?"

At the word "treason" Pleasant colored slightly. He fancied he detected a tone of irony in the language. Could Bentley know of his meeting with Helen? He responded with as much calmness as he could command,—

"I mean you didn't tell me of this. Your return is such a surprise,—so sudden, so unexpected. What does it mean, Bentley?"

"It means that I, Richard Bentley, late of the Confederate States of America, have at last laid down my arms and taken the oath of allegiance, and pro-

pose to dwell once more in the land of my fathers. Here am I in my own proper person. Don't you recognize my right to citizenship? Am I not welcome?"

"Welcome?" said Pleasant. "Of course, you are welcome! thrice welcome! and you know it, my dear boy."

But, despite his hearty greeting, Pleasant felt extremely embarrassed and ill at ease. Nevertheless he overcame his feelings as best he could, and pressed Bentley to accompany him to the cottage and spend the night.

Bentley thanked him, but said he must return to the hotel; he would come over early in the morning for a long talk.

"No, sir!" replied Pleasant, "I couldn't think of allowing you to go back to the hotel. You shall eat and sleep under my roof this night, and nowhere else. I'll take no excuse. So come right along."

In fact, Bentley was not anxious to return to the hotel, but was glad of so early an opportunity of a long and uninterrupted interview with his friend. And so he accepted the pressing invitation, and arm in arm the two men wended their way along the narrow path to the humble cottage.

There were few happier circles than that gathered around the simple board that evening. Mrs. Waters

presided at the head, while Pleasant sat at the foot. On one side was Bentley. His face wore a genial, pleasant expression, such as it had not known for many a long day. It was an expression that was wont to dwell on his features long ago in his earlier years, and which had returned to him on revisiting the scenes of his youth.

Opposite him sat Winnie Waters, half sad, half dignified, with blue eyes and hair of gold, and, withal, a face that to Bentley seemed as pure and beautiful as an angel's.

Bentley was never in finer spirits. The presence of familiar friends, the congenial surroundings, the very air he breathed, all were an inspiration to him.

Pleasant, though fully aware of the cause of Bentley's sudden return, was nevertheless completely disarmed of all feeling of annoyance or embarrassment by the gay spirits and cordial manners of his friend. He felt that, whatever had been said to Bentley with reference to the charges made by Baldwin, it had found no lodgment in his mind. Nor had Bentley so much as hinted of what he had witnessed that evening between Helen and Pleasant. It was a very difficult matter for Pleasant to define his real feelings at the moment. Was he glad to see Bentley? The question was constantly in his mind. How could he be otherwise? Such was his invariable answer. And yet,

after all, was he really glad that Bentley had returned to take up his residence for all time, and to claim as his own the hand of the woman who had become so suddenly and so unmistakably endeared to Pleasant himself?

Did Pleasant really love Helen Baldwin? Often had he asked himself that question, but he dared not trust himself to an unreserved answer.

Now that he realized that another might step in between him and her, he no longer asked the question, but felt with all the intensity of his being that he loved her, and that life would not be worth the living without her. These thoughts came unbidden to his mind even as he laughed and talked that night with Bentley over the rough experience of the wild Western life.

After supper the friends retired to the cosey veranda before the cottage door. The moonbeams, slipping through the trellised vines, cast a checkered light upon the floor. The air was balmy and odoriferous. The two men lit their cigars, and, drawing their chairs close, seated themselves for a long and interesting talk.

Bentley rarely erred in his estimate of men. He had long known Waters, and had learned to love and admire him for his many excellent traits of character. He had every opportunity of studying his character. He was with him through the four eventful years of

the Civil War, a period that truly tried men's souls, for then whatever of meanness or littleness, whatever of cowardice or treachery was in the man was sure to rise to the surface, and whatever was good, and noble, and true stood forth grandly conspicuous.

Waters had been subjected to this trying ordeal, and had come forth as pure gold from the crucible. Bentley had learned to regard him as the one man in whom he could place the most implicit confidence. He had been loath, therefore, to condemn him upon mere allegations, based on circumstantial evidence.

He felt that proof of the strongest and most convincing nature must be adduced to remove the doubt, if doubt there was, of his friend's innocence. With such feelings as these Bentley had returned to Virginia in response to Baldwin's urgent request.

The peculiar circumstances under which he was placed so soon after his return seemed an act of Providence, to afford speedy and convincing proof of the falsity of the charges against his lifelong friend and comrade. But the interview which he had unintentionally witnessed settled more doubts than one. He was now satisfied of the mutual love existing between Helen and Pleasant.

Convinced now of the innocence of his friend, convinced of the meanness and littleness of Baldwin, convinced of the pure and honest love existing between

Helen and Pleasant, he determined that, in so far, at least, as he was concerned, no impediment should stand in the way of a free and unreserved declaration of love on the part of his friend. And so, sitting there in the shadow of the trailing vine, he talked freely and unreservedly to his friend. Told him of the correspondence with Baldwin, of his resolution to return to Virginia, of the part he had just enacted as spectator in the scene beneath the shrubbery, and concluded by assuring him that he, Pleasant, and he alone, was worthy of the love of so good and pure a woman as Helen, and that he rejoiced in this opportunity to bid him "God-speed."

CHAPTER XXII.

"DAUGHTER," said old Mr. Baldwin that evening after tea, "I have a piece of good news for you."

"What is it, father?"

"Guess," said he, with his accustomed smile.

"I'm sure I don't know. Tell me, father, what it is."

"An old friend is in town," he said, with a mischievous twinkle in his eye. "Can you guess now?"

"Indeed I cannot. Whom do you mean, father? Tell me."

"I'll bet a dollar I know!" chimed in the incorrigible Mrs. Norton.

"Never mind you," said the old gentleman. "Let Helen guess. You surely must know by this time, daughter."

"I declare I don't," earnestly persisted Helen.

"Oh, fiddlesticks, Helen! You do know, and it's no use saying you don't," again put in Mrs. Norton, the irrepressible. "It's Dick Bentley. I'll bet five cents it's Dick Bentley. Now, isn't it, father?"

"Exactly who it is. I'm surprised, Helen, you couldn't guess," said he, not a little annoyed at his

daughter's apparent indifference. "I heard of his arrival just as I was leaving the store. He is stopping at the Littleton House. Possibly he may call round to-night, but I guess he's pretty well fagged out from the journey, and will probably wait until morning."

"My!" exclaimed Mrs. Norton, experiencing a kind of rapturous feeling at the good news imparted by her father. "I'm so glad he's come back. Goodness knows, it's been awfully stupid in this horrid old town since Dick went away, and to have such a jolly fellow as Dick back again,—it's just too awfully nice to think about. Dick and I always did have a nice time together. I wonder if he's changed much? I wish he'd call to-night. Don't you, Helen?"

Old Baldwin cast a significant glance at Helen, and watched her countenance to see whether or no it indicated any pleasurable emotion at the probability of so early a meeting with Bentley. Helen replied to her sister's inquiry with a degree of composure surprising even to herself. "I shall be glad to see Mr. Bentley whenever he feels disposed to honor us with a visit. To say that I am glad he has come back does not express my true feelings. I am delighted. I don't know anybody I'd rather meet now than Mr. Bentley."

"Nor I," said Baldwin, "if for no other reason

than to satisfy you what a d——n scoundrel that fellow Waters is."

Helen turned sharply around as her father uttered these bitter words. Her first impulse was to rise and hurl back into his teeth the cruel words he had spoken, and defend the good name and honor of her absent friend even at the risk of being driven from her father's home. But a moment's reflection admonished her that Pleasant would soon have an opportunity of meeting his accuser face to face and triumphing over him in his own superior might. Therefore she made no reply, but arose and walked out of the room.

Meanwhile, Baldwin, not noticing his daughter's movements, took down his tobacco, and lighting his pipe, continued his remarks between the great clouds of smoke that poured from his distended jaws.

"Dick Bentley will settle him in short order. See if he don't. He'll come to the store the first thing in the morning,—the very first thing. Then I guess we'll bring that young fellow to grief." Then he lapsed into silence, and gave himself up to the enjoyment of his pipe and the communion of his own evil thoughts.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BALDWIN was at his office betimes the next morning. He smiled at the clerks behind the counters, and he smiled at Pompey, the negro lad who swept out the office, and even tossed him a nickel as he told him to bestir himself and brush away the dust and clean out the dirt from the corners.

Pompey stood for a moment with his mouth stretched across the broad expanse of his black face, displaying a row of teeth as white as purest ivory. He was lost in wonder at this unprecedented behavior on the part of "his master."

"What kin be de matter wid de boss?" soliloquized the astonished boy. "He flung me dis yer nickel, an' in all my bawn days I nebber knowed him ter 'splay sech a lib'el spirit afore. Some'in' mighty ku'se gwine tér happen, sho'!"

"What are you standing there staring and jabbering about, you black rascal!" shouted Baldwin. "Didn't you hear me tell you to sweep out this office? Go to work, sir! Go to work this minute!"

Before the minute was half gone the astonished Pompey had raised such a dust that it set every one

who came into the room to coughing and sneezing in the most violent manner.

“Why didn’t you sprinkle the floor, you block-head!” roared Baldwin. And here he was seized with a fit of coughing that lasted until the dust had cleared away sufficiently for one to see the way across the room. But what with the coughing and the dust in his eyes, Baldwin was so blinded that he could with difficulty discern the form of the man just entering the door. He was looking for Bentley at that very time, and of course it could be none other than Bentley.

“Well, well,” said Baldwin, approaching and extending his hand, “here you are at last, Richard. And right welcome you are, my boy. Give me your hand for a hearty shake. What! not going to shake hands! Why, am I mistaken!—not Bentley? You here, sir! What can you want, sir, with me?”

The dust had fairly cleared away now, and Baldwin’s eyes had suddenly opened very wide, and upon his face was an expression of wonderment as he beheld in the person confronting him the manly form of Waters.

“What can I want with you, do you ask?” replied Pleasant. “I am here, sir, to refute the base slanders you have circulated about me. You have attempted to defame my character. You have sought to poison with foul suspicion the mind of the best friend I

have on earth. And I am here, sir, to convict you out of your own mouth!"

Baldwin retreated towards his desk, sat down in the old arm-chair beside it, and turned towards Pleasant with a look of mute astonishment.

Pleasant approached nearer, and, with his gaze fixed steadily upon him, continued to speak. In a few words he refuted the base charges against himself, removed every foul suspicion that could have found a lodgment in the mind of any one, and, while vindicating his own actions, made clear as the light of day the littleness and the meanness of his false accuser.

As he finished, Bentley, who, all unseen, had been a quiet listener to every word spoken by his friend, now came forward and confronted Baldwin.

"And here am I," said he, "to bear witness to my friend's honorable conduct in all matters of business intrusted to him by me, and to denounce you, sir, for the mean and contemptible spirit you have displayed throughout the whole affair!"

Baldwin rose from his chair. His face was livid with rage.

"A conspiracy, sir!" he exclaimed, excitedly pointing his long bony finger at Waters. "I understand it! I see a vile conspiracy here! I'll show you, young man——"

What further Baldwin intended to say will never be

recorded. Before the sentence was finished, he suddenly threw up his hands and fell prostrate upon the floor at Bentley's feet. In less than five minutes the soul of Josiah Baldwin had taken its long flight to the spirit world.

Everybody in and about the store was now in a state of intense excitement. All sorts of wild rumors flew about the town, and the people came flocking to learn the truth.

Meanwhile, Pleasant had summoned the family physician, who came, felt of the rich man's pulse, examined the region of his heart, and pronounced him dead. "The cause,—the cause?" eagerly inquired the bystanders. After a short conversation with Bentley and Waters, the physician announced that Baldwin had died of apoplexy, brought on by undue excitement. "Just what I have always feared," coolly remarked the physician. "A man of his physique and habits was a fit subject for such an attack."

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was five years later at Littleton. The cloud of gloom that settled down upon the little family at the Baldwins, after the terrible blow inflicted by the death of the father, had passed away, and in its stead were sunny smiles and cheery laughter. Marvellous changes had come over the village. The genial climate and fine scenery were attracting people in search of health, or rest from the crowded and toil-worn and dust-laden city. Northern capital found profitable investment in the newly discovered mineral deposit around Littleton. New life was infused into the hitherto staid town, and property once idle and useless commanded fabulous prices. Littleton was experiencing what, in common vernacular, is known as a "boom." Everybody in and around the town profited by it. Pleasant Waters profited by it, since the rapid advance in real estate enabled him to dispose of town lots, that for a long while had been only a burden, at prices that realized a handsome sum of money,—a sum far beyond his most sanguine expectations. With the means thus realized he erected upon the ruins of the old homestead a handsome residence,

fitted out with all the improvements and conveniences of modern times.

Here Bentley, now the inseparable companion of Waters, found profitable investment for his little patrimony. Here, too, he found an honorable and lucrative employment for the future, and wisely concluded not to return to the wild West. If the truth were known, Bentley had other reasons for being so easily reconciled to the new order of things. Be that as it may, he resolved henceforth to become a good, true, and lawful citizen of his native Commonwealth. Carr Michael, always frugal and industrious, was, in the capacity of sole manager of Brook Farm, the happiest of men. Uncle Abe and Aunt Emily, always faithful, had moved into the cottage, there to abide the remainder of their joint and several lives. Mrs. Waters presided with the dignity of the matured matron over the new mansion, now swept and garnished and handsomely furnished for the approaching nuptials of Richard and Winnie, and—need we add—for the future home of Pleasant, and of Helen his fair young bride.

Theirs to be

“One feast, one house, one mutual happiness.”

THE END.

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